

Romans 15:1-6 (NKJV)

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2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

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4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,

6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you read verses 1-6 asking what the primary point is, you will end up answering unity. We are to be like minded. We are to, with one mind and one mouth, glorify God. We are to please God as a whole.

I have tried to improve upon what John MacArthur has said but could not. So I thought it would be good to review what he said, largely based on direct scripture quotes. Keep in mind that what we are looking at is how the Lord has promised to provide unity in His people.

This is a long quote. I will interrupt it several times.

“God has always been deeply concerned about the unity of His people. By salvation, He has effected a real spiritual oneness. He has created a commonness based on sharing the same eternal life. This **reality** of conversion should impact the life of the church by being the impetus for **practical** unity. Scripture emphasizes both aspects.”

In other words, the unity we have by who we **ARE** should affect the unity of how we **LIVE**.

Now listen to just how many places God shows us how important unity is.

“Through David, the Lord proclaimed, "**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!**" (Ps. 133:1). Speaking specifically of His chosen people Israel, He prophesied through Jeremiah that one day, "**They shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and for the good of**

their children after them" (Jer. 32:38-39). In one of Ezekiel's visions, the Lord instructed the prophet, **"Son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.'** Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand,... and they will be one in My hand" (Ezek. 37:16-17, 19; cf. Hos. 1:11).

Speaking of the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike, God predicted that in the end times, **"I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him shoulder to shoulder" (Zeph. 3:9), that is, side by side, as brothers. "The Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one" (Zech. 14:9).**

The unity of believers is also the concern of God the Son. Speaking on one occasion before a largely Jewish audience, Jesus said, **"I have other sheep [Gentiles], which are not of this fold [Israel]; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd" (John 10:16).** In other words, God's eternal plan is that all who believe in Him will become outwardly what they already are inwardly—unified in Him through faith in His Son. "When all things are subjected to Him [Christ]," Paul says, **"then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).** Ultimately, everyone who belongs to the Lord will be united in a great and glorious fellowship with Him and with each other.

While exiled on the island of Patmos, the apostle John wrote, **I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."** (Rev. 21:1-4)

Even for now, however, despite the limitations of the remaining old garments of the sinful flesh, it is the Lord's absolute and unconditional will that His people be in harmony with Him and with each other.

The unity of His people was one of the desires our Savior expressed in His high priestly prayer: **"I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are" (John 17:11).**

The unity of the church is also, of course, the concern of God the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Spirit dramatically came upon and indwelt the apostles **(Acts 2:4), who then were miraculously enabled to speak "of the mighty deeds of God" in the native languages of the multitude of Jews from various parts of the world who had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost (vv. 7-12).** After Peter preached before the great crowd, **"they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (vv. 37-38).**

With the indwelling of the Spirit came a spiritual unity among believers that immediately was expressed in selfless service to one another. The some **"three thousand souls"** who believed the gospel and were saved that day **"were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (vv. 41-42, 44-47).**

In the days following, as the apostles, especially Peter and John, continued to preach, **"the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them... For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need" (Acts 4:32, 34-35)."**

MacArthur goes on to say- "There is no evidence that this practice of the infant church in Jerusalem became the standard for other churches of that time or that it continued indefinitely even in Jerusalem. But the spiritual unity and selflessness

of those early believers should characterize every Christian and every congregation in every age.

In his letter to Ephesus, Paul declared that, **"with all humility and gentleness, with patience,"** we should show **"forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"** (4:2-3). He then specifically mentions the participation of each Person of the Trinity in the spiritual welfare and unity of the church. **"There is one body and one Spirit;... one Lord [Christ, the Son], one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all"** (vv. 4-6,).

To the factious, discordant church at Corinth, Paul wrote: **"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment"** (1 Cor. 1:10). Later in the same letter, he reminded them that, **"even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit"** (12:12-13).

The apostle reminded believers in the Galatian churches that **"you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"** (Gal. 3:26-28). He admonished believers in Philippi: **"Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel"** (Phil. 1:27). They would make his **"joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose"** (2:2).

In the church of Christ, **"there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all"** (Col. 3:11). Among the characteristics that make for unity and harmony in the church are **"a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other"** (vv. 12-13). "And beyond all these things," Paul continues, **"put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity"** (v. 14).

Peter admonishes Christians to **"be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit"** (1 Pet. 3:8). In his first letter, John emphasizes the relationship between spiritual unity and the divine light of God's Word: **"If we**

walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7). He also emphasizes the relationship between unity and love—God's love for us and our love for God and for each other. **"We know love by this," he says, "that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:16-18; cf. 4:11, 20-21).**

Apart from outright sin, nothing shatters the fellowship, the spiritual growth, and the witness of a congregation so much as disharmony among its members. Romans 15 continues Paul's teaching on the vital importance of unity in the church, adding two more principles for achieving that objective. The first is pleasing one another, following the example of our Lord (vv. 1-6), and the second,, is rejoicing with one another in God's eternal plan of redemption (vv. 7-13). In the first of these heartfelt appeals, Paul calls believers to please one another, using Christ Himself as our model.

He mentions six spiritual characteristics that should lead us to please one another:

regard for others (15:1a),
disregard of self (vv. 1b-2),
conformity to Christ (v. 3),
submission to Scripture (v. 4),
dependence on divine power (v. 5),
and giving glory to God (v. 6).” MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The -
MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16.

You can probably see by now why I quoted what Mr. MacArthur said. His use of scripture to emphasize the importance of unity is excellent. The point is irrefutably made. It is vitally important to God that His children walk in unity. When something is mentioned that many times in scripture we KNOW it is important. How are we doing with that? Are we doing anything to cause discord in the body? That is worth a self examination.

Now let's re-read our text.

Romans 15:1-6 (NKJV)

1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."

4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,

6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now remember that the strong in this context are those who accurately understand their freedoms in Christ. Paul lays a greater burden on the strong than he lays on the weak.

The word for "ought" basically means owing a debt or having a strong obligation. The priest in Hebrews 5:3 was **obligated** to offer sacrifices for sin. That is the same word. Where scripture says "if God so loved us, we also **ought** to love one another" the ought is the same word. We are **indebted** to love one another. It is requirement placed on us. It isn't something to be taken lightly.

The word for **bear** means to pick up and carry a burden. It is carrying a weight. So what Paul is telling the strong here is substantial.

I took my boys backpacking at Dolly Sods years ago. I wanted to show them "how it was done". So we packed up our packs. If I recall correctly my pack was the heaviest. Now I could be wrong about that. But after walking up hill for what seemed like a decade, we started walking down hill. And that is when my knees had all they could take. It got to the place that it was difficult to put one more foot in front of the other. My boys didn't show me contempt. They didn't make fun of me. They didn't point out that I wasn't exactly the poster child for midlife backpacking. They simply opened up my backpack and started taking things from mine and putting it into theirs. They were doing **physically** what we are being told to do in our text **spiritually**.

The stronger brother is to approach the weaker brother, not with contempt. Not condescending to them. Not being critical. No. We are to voluntarily lay down a freedom that we legitimately have, for the weaker brother's good.

1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Notice in this verse the either/or setting. Either we carry the weight caused by our weaker brother's hyperactive conscience, OR We please ourselves. We cannot do both. That is the normal price of love. There is nothing **unusual** about

that. If you look around the room this morning you will see people who **will cost you something**. And the stronger you are, the **more** they will cost you. And at the same time, those same people will **pay a cost** for you. We don't need to be surprised by that. And we sure shouldn't live in such a way that we never ask each other for help. Part of **needing** each other is **paying a cost** for each other. The question to ask is not "**will this cost someone something?**" The question to ask is "**how can I most glorify Christ?**" In our walks we will often need help to glorify Christ. We may need counsel. We may need a helping hand. We may need any number of things. And if those things are needed to **glorify Christ** better, to **love Him better**, to **serve Him better**, that cost is what fellow believers are here for. And that is what we are here for, for them.

Bearing each other's burdens is part of our work here. It is meaningful work. In fact it is the quickest way for a person to feel **needed and useful**. It truly is more blessed to **give** than to receive. It is an honor for a brother or sister to ask us for help, to ask us to help carry a burden. So while it is work, it is a blessed work. And in the end, it is nothing in comparison to the work that Christ did and does for us.

And what will it cost us? Well, sometimes it will cost us our pleasure. And it is always worth it. Because our brother's spiritual health is always more important than our own pleasure. It is simply a higher priority. Christ displayed that in His own life. And he is our leader.

2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

Paul uses the same word for pleasure here. So the choice is please your brother for **his** good, look after **your brother's** spiritual health. Or please **yourself**. We **often** face that decision. We often have that choice to make.

I recently read about a man who is affiliated with Christian Aid who crossed the border into Syria with a car full of food and supplies. He traveled back roads at night with his lights turned off. He was travelling through areas that the rebels hold. Had he been spotted he would surely have been killed. He showed up at a place that normally held a few Christians. The place was packed. Christians had come from all over to have at least a little refuge. This man could have pleased himself. He could have stayed at home with his wife and his family. But he did not. He chose the pleasure of his neighbor over his own. And as a result the needs of those believers were met. They were built up. They were edified.

This attitude is not the **exception** to the rule in Christianity. It IS the **rule**. Loving others costs something. But that is ok. Because that is what we are here for. And

as we pay that cost, people are made stronger in their faith. They are better prepared for the next step. And the kingdom is well served.

As Christians we must live with the expectation that we are **not here to be served but to serve others**. Our evaluations should never be based on **what will others give to me**, but what do they **need** from me? While we will and must ask for help when we need it, we live with the mentality that we are here for their benefit, not our own.

In our text it is talking about giving up freedoms, but other scriptures show us that the cost could be any of a number of things, and ultimately giving up our lives.

That is the mindset of Christ.

Which takes us to the next verse.

3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."

Remember Philipians at Church Camp. Remember the song- I want that same mind in me?

Philippians 2:5-8 (NKJV)

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

We talked at that camp about what Christ would have done if He wanted to please himself. He would have never left heaven. And you and I would be headed to hell and we would fully deserve it. We would have no gripes.

Christ is always our example for life. The more we look at life **like He did**, the more we will do the things **that please Him**. The more we are **Christ minded**, the more **useful** we are to the kingdom.

When we want to pity ourselves for the price we are asked to pay in His service, we need only to look at **the price Christ paid for us** to gain the proper perspective. He had more rights than we will ever have. He had more freedoms than we will ever have. He was more worthy of being served than we will ever be. He had more reason to make demands than we will ever have. And he had more power to enforce His will than we will ever have. And what was his lifestyle?

He set his pleasure aside and did those things that would edify us.

"The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."

This is from Psalm 69:9

But let me read it from verse 6 to get a better feel for the context.

Psalm 69:6-9 (NKJV)

6 Let not those who wait for You, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed because of me; Let not those who seek You be confounded because of me, O God of Israel.

7 Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; Shame has covered my face.

8 I have become a stranger to my brothers, And an alien to my mother's children;

9 Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.

David originally penned these words about his situation, but they were prophetic. I believe Paul referred to this passage to show the price that Christ paid to come to this planet and to represent God. We might want to complain that there are freedoms we must curtail for a brother's best interest. We might start to pity ourselves over this cost. It is almost as if Paul says, **"do you want to see cost?"** I will show you cost. The King of the universe showed up and was roughed up and ultimately killed by the enemies of God. If anyone had reason to whine and complain, Christ did. But he did not complain. Why? For the joy set before Him. He knew the ultimate end and it was worth it to Him to first, please His Father and second, fill eternity with His family.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

Doesn't it always come back to this in the Christian life? Sometimes we get the wrong idea about life. We get self focused. We lose perspective. We start expecting heaven on earth. We expect the cost to be small and the reward to be great here. And we forget the life of Christ. We forget what it was like for our Master when He walked in our shoes.

So scripture continually takes us back. It continually reminds us of Christ. And it tells us how **HE** had to think to live the faithful Christian life. It tells us how to follow His example.

We look to Jesus. He authored our faith. He started the whole thing. And He will finish our faith. He will take us into eternity. So **He** is our authority. **He** is our example. And how did he handle the cost? He focused on what was promised and yet to come. He looked at where He was headed and what He was doing this for in the middle of His suffering. And He endured until He received His reward. And that is exactly how we must think. Whether we are dealing with **persecution by our enemies**, or the cost of **loving our brothers**, or the strain of **obeying through temptation**. It all requires the same mindset. We need to be like our big brother Jesus. Then we will be the most useful to those around us who need us most.

So a couple of applications for us this morning:

How are you building up unity in this body? What are you doing to improve our unity? What are you doing to pull people together?

And the reverse is, what are you doing to harm unity. What are you saying or doing that would lead others to be less trusting, less dependent, less loving.

Remember that the sin of dissention is similar to the sin of witchcraft in scripture. It is that bad.

And then how do you view your life? Is it for your pleasure? Is every decision made to make you happy? Or is it made for the pleasure of God and for others? How does it compare to the life and attitude of Christ. If this were the only application we made this year, and we made it all year, comparing how we live to how Christ lived, we would be different people by the end of the year. So I think we have enough to consider for this week.