

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 6-5-11 PM NOTES  
"THE PURPOSE OF UNITY"  
ROMANS 15:1-13  
#69 in Series, "Verse by Verse through Romans"

**John 17:11b (NKJV)** "...Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are."

**Romans 15:6 (NASB)** "so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. Look Away from Self (V1)

**Philippians 2:3-4 (NKJV)** "<sup>3</sup>Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

II. Focus on Others (V2-3)

A. The Edification of Our Neighbor (V2)

**Galatians 1:10 (ESV)** "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."

B. The Example of Christ (V3)

**Philippians 2:6-8 (NASB)** "<sup>6</sup>who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

III. Submit to Scripture (V4)

**1 Corinthians 10:11 (NKJV)** "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

IV. Depend on God's Power (V5-6)

**Romans 15:5 (NIV)** "May the **God** who gives endurance and encouragement **give you** a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus".

V. Accept One Another (V7)

VI. Unity Illustrated (V8-12)

VII. A Unity Benediction (V13)

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 6-5-11 PM  
"THE PURPOSE OF UNITY"  
ROMANS 15:1-13  
#69 in Series, "Verse by Verse through Romans"

The Lord loves unity among His children. On the night before Jesus was crucified, He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Of all the things He could have prayed for as He faced death on a cruel cross, He prayed for the unity of His disciples. **John 17:11b (NKJV)** "...Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as *We are*."

One of the results of the chronic disunity of the church is that the world generally looks on the church with skepticism and even disdain. Someone has said that the average person in the world only thinks of the church for three times: for when they are hatched, matched, and dispatched. That is when a baby is baptized, christened, or dedicated; when one is married, and at a person's death. The world sees the church as hypocritical. They hear all the talk about love and unity and yet all they see is the church fuss, fight, and split. In church history, there have been some major church fights over truth. I have a great book in my library by Erwin Lutzer entitled *The Doctrines That Divide*. The sub-title is *A Fresh Look at the Historic Doctrines That Separate Christians*. The book is actually a good summary of church history. It talks about the huge split in the early church over the deity of Christ; there is the split between Augustine and Pelagius and their followers over the effects of Adam's sin on all mankind. Lutzer does an excellent job detailing the rift in fellowship in the time of the Reformers over the issue of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone versus justification through a mixture of grace and merit and actually over the definition of justification itself. There was the split between those who believed about salvation as John Calvin articulated and those who believed as Jacob Arminius taught. This split was over the sovereignty of God in man's salvation and whether lost mankind is truly dead in sin with a will that is bondage to sin or mostly dead but left with the ability to choose with a free will. There are some things in the realm of truth that are worth sacrificing unity for. The greatest damage done in the world by disunity in the church is not these huge doctrinal truth controversies; the greatest damage is the disunity in local churches among the members of those churches over issues of personal preferences, customs, and questionable non fundamental doctrines. I remember when I was a boy the huge fuss in our church over whether or not to have a Christmas tree in the sanctuary. I also remember a big fight over whether we should increase our full-time Pastor's salary from \$75 a week to \$100 a week. I remember Dr W. A. Criswell, the long time Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, writing about a church fuss that had happened in the small Kentucky church he was pastoring while he was a student at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. The split had happened several years before he came to the church. As he investigated the huge split, he found that it was over the side of the sanctuary where the piano would be located. He found that one of the leading people in instigating the split had been an elderly man in the church. Dr. Criswell went to visit this elderly man. After some small talk, Dr. Criswell brought up the infamous split and asked the man which side of the sanctuary he fought so hard to have the piano located on. He said that the old man paused and then called for his wife and said, "Dear, which side was it that we wanted that piano on?" That may seem like an extreme example, but it is more often issues like this that splits churches than doctrine like the deity of Christ or the sovereignty of God in salvation. Most church fusses are over the style of music in the services, the leadership style of the Pastor, or a discontinuance or replacement of someone's favorite program or ministry. Dr Kent Hughes shares the strangest split I've heard of. There were two churches in a small community that were both struggling to survive. They decided that it might be better if they merged and thus become one larger church with more financial stability and the ability to do more ministries. It seemed to make sense, but they never pulled it off. What was the problem? They couldn't agree on how they would recite the Lord's Prayer. One of the congregations wanted to say, "Forgive us our trespasses" while the other wanted to say, "Forgive us our debts". The local newspaper did a story on it and the article said, "One church went back to its trespasses

and the other returned to its debts.” We laugh at that, but that is the type of thing that has made the church a laughingstock in the world.

As important as unity in the Body of Christ is for the reputation of the church in the world, there is a more important motive for unity. The greatest motive for unity is found in verse six – **Romans 15:6 (NASB)** referring to unity in the church says, “so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The ultimate importance of unity is that unity in the Lord’s church glorifies God. Since that is true, the greatest evil in disunity is that it clouds or distorts God’s true glory before a world that desperately needs to know Him.

In Romans 15:1-13, we see how to have the kind of unity that glorifies God.

## I. Look Away from Self (V1)

Those last five words are the key to unity: “...and not to please ourselves”. When there is disunity that is not over truth about a fundamental of the faith, the issue is always selfishness (though the selfish ones seldom recognize their selfishness). In the previous message, we went over the two groups of people that are in every church. The two groups are the strong and the weak. The strong are more spiritually mature who know their freedom in Christ. They are not bound by customs or traditions of man. Their conscience gives them the freedom to enjoy anything that is not prohibited in the Scripture either by command or clear principle. The weak are the more immature believers who still operate by rules and regulations that are rooted in tradition and culture and reactions against problems in their life before they came to Christ. Even though the Bible doesn’t command these traditions, their untrained conscience bothers and condemns them when they participate in certain activities or fail to participate in others. It is not usually so clear cut as all members fitting under one of those categories (strong or weak) in every area of their life. Many people in the church have a mixture of areas where they are strong in spiritual maturity and areas where they are weak in their maturity. We saw in chapter 14 that love responds this way: the strong in spiritual maturity do not flaunt their liberty in Christ and the weak in spiritual maturity do not judge the strong because the strong’s conscience gives them freedom to do certain things that are not commanded or forbidden in the Scriptures. The primary burden, however, is with the strong to lay aside some of the areas that they may have freedom to participate in or not participate in so as not to offend the weaker brethren. The word translated “ought” means to have a debt or a strong obligation. The word translated “bear with” refers to picking up and carrying a burden. The strong have the debt and obligation to pick up and carry the weaker brethren.

The question often comes as to whether the strong must always limit their freedom to keep from offending the weaker brother. We dealt with this question some in the last message. When the issue that offends the weaker brother has to do with the purity of the gospel, the strong must stand firm. If the weaker brother is truly saved, then the stronger brother teaches him and helps reprogram his conscience to be in agreement with the gospel. The purity of the gospel must be preserved whether another is offended or not. Also, when the weaker brother has some scruple that is disruptive to unity and harmful to their spiritual life, the stronger brother must confront them and in love teach them that the thing they are doing or not doing is not commanded or forbidden in Scripture. The guide on issues that are neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture is love that is described in **Philippians 2:3-4 (NKJV)** “<sup>3</sup> Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

## II. Focus on Others (V2-3)

### A. The Edification of Our Neighbor (V2)

There is a type of pleasing others which God does not approve. Any pleasing of others that involves compromising the truth is forbidden in Scripture. **Galatians 1:10 (ESV)** “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” The pleasing that is spoken of in verse 2 is the kind that builds him up. This pleasing involves ministering to the real needs of our neighbor (whether or not he realizes what his need

really is). The goal of all of our relationships within the body of Christ is to build up. The word translated “edification” in verse 2 means to build up or to mature or develop. The goal of relationships in the body of Christ is not my rights, my freedom, my desires and preferences; the goal is to be God’s instrument of growth and edification in the life of another. The contrast here is between building up another member of the body and causing them to stumble (Romans 14:13, 20, 21), to tear them down, or to destroy them (Romans 14:15). This often involves the adjustment of our lifestyle to whatever contributes to the edifying of another member of the body of Christ.

#### B. The Example of Christ (V3)

Often the evangelical church has shied away from proclaiming Jesus as an example. That is an overreaction to liberals who teach that He was only an example and deny the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ. The fact is that while Jesus was so much more than our example, He is our example. Paul quotes here Psalm 69:9. The point is that Jesus had to be selfless to minister to us at the point of our deepest need. The passage that most thoroughly shows what Christ suffered for us is **Philippians 2:6-8 (NASB)** “<sup>6</sup> who [Jesus Christ], although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” There is a contrast Paul is subtly making here. Our laying aside our rights for the good of another in the body of Christ involves giving up some liberty that might provide a little enjoyment for a short time here on earth. Jesus, by contrast gave up His place of adoration and worship in heaven and emptied Himself of the arbitrary exercise of the attributes of deity and humbled Himself (this one who was God from eternity past) to be born in a smelly cattle stall into a life of poverty and then to die the most shameful death known to man – death on a cross. How does our sacrifice for others compare to the sacrifice of the One who is our example? How does our giving up the momentary pleasure of an alcoholic beverage that might cause another to stumble compare with Jesus giving up the glory of heaven and coming to earth to take our sins and die for them?

We look away from self and focus on the need for edification of others.

#### III. Submit to Scripture (V4)

After using a passage from the Psalms to make His point, Paul takes a moment to extol the importance of the Scriptures in guiding and giving us hope in our times of sacrifice and trial. Paul is obviously referring to what we call the Old Testament. He says that even though there was an obvious first receiver of the Scripture, because they were of God, they are for the generations that would follow those original recipients. Paul said basically the same thing as he referred to the time of the Exodus and the wilderness warnings of the Israelites in **1 Corinthians 10:11 (NKJV)** “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” Don’t ever underestimate the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures for teaching us, giving us patience and comfort that leads to hope. This would be a good time for me to let you know what is coming up after we finish the book of Romans on Sunday evenings. I am going to do a one year series on an overview of the whole Old Testament! We will see the foundation for all that is taught in the New Testament. Often God’s people neglect the Old Testament and see it as being irrelevant to today. It may interest you to know that almost everything that Jesus taught was dealt with in the Old Testament. Jesus simply expounded on what the Old Testament taught and applied it. We will study Old Testament and chronology and see the many principles and truths all through it that are so easily applied to today.

Notice more specifically what the Scriptures do. First, they give patience or perseverance. That word refers to holding up when circumstances weigh you down. The truths taught in the Old Testament are used by the Holy Spirit to give you endurance and patience. Secondly, the Scriptures give you comfort. That word means to come alongside and lift up. It is better translated “encouragement” in most other translations. When we learn the Scriptures, receive patience and encouragement, then we have hope. We see even in the Old Testament that God has plans and promises for the future whatever that future may

hold for us. Hope is the confident expectation that what God has promised, He will bring to pass in His timing!

#### IV. Depend on God's Power (V5-6)

The God who gives us patience, encouragement and hope from the Scriptures enables us to have unity with one another. Everything our great God commands us, He makes available the power to obey it. Unity is when we are like minded toward one another and He is the one who "grants" us that ability. I like the NIV of **Romans 15:5 (NIV)** "May the **God** who gives endurance and encouragement **give you** a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus". When we are all tuned in to God's patience, encouragement, and hope, we will be tuned in to each other. If you put 100 pianos in a room and tune them all with one tuning fork, they will all be tuned to one another.

Again, why does He want us to be one, likeminded? That He might be glorified through the supernatural unity of His people. May God keep us likeminded that we might glorify Him! May nothing rob us of unity and thus cause us to rob God of His glory.

#### V. Accept One Another (V7)

Most translations say "accept one another". Our response to all the diversity of the members of the body of Christ is to accept one another wherever they are maturity wise or temperament wise or spiritual gift wise or whatever quirks or hang-ups they have. We are of the same family and the same body. The word translated "accept" or "receive" in verse 7 is the normal word used to accept someone as they are, to take in, but it is intensified. It means to completely, without hesitation accept and take in. This word is also an imperative. We don't have a choice as to whom we accept. We accept all that God places in the body of Christ. Our example is how Christ accepts us. He accepts us joyfully; He accepts us in spite of our sin; He accepts us to the glory of God. We become trophies of His amazing grace throughout all eternity.

#### VI. Unity Illustrated (V8-12)

The greatest display of unity in the history of the church is the unity experienced between the Jews and the Gentiles in the early church. He shows that bringing gentiles into God's forever family was not some new unheard of truth. Jesus came not only to fulfill God's promises to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles.

#### VII. A Unity Benediction (V13)

What an amazing prayer! Most of the great words of the faith are found in this one verse: "hope", "joy". "peace", "believing", and "power". When a church is filled with the Spirit of God, it will be characterized by joy, peace, hope, and power. There will be Joy in the midst of grief; peace in the midst of turmoil, and hope when from an earthly perspective the way looks hopeless.

#### CONCLUSION

Is there any dissention between you and someone else in the body? If so, deal with it tonight. Is there anyone you are not accepting? You are in rebellion if that is true. Repent. May God grant us unity in order that we may glorify Him! (3043)