

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
LOVING GOD AND LIVING GODLY – Chapters 12-14

LESSON 51 – THE FINAL CALL FOR UNITY – Romans 15:7-13

God's acceptance of us is a model for our acceptance of each other. The greatest example of unity coming out of diversity is God choosing to unite Jews and Gentiles in one spiritual body.

Paul's message in chapters 14 and 15 has been...together is better in the body of Christ. His message was timely because Christianity had entered a divided world...Greeks and Romans, Arabs and Jews, slave and free, religious and pagan. In this section of Romans 15, Paul extends his message about the spiritually weak and strong in the church to include Jews and Gentiles.

Paul's point is that redemption tears down the walls of division and disunity between Jews and Gentiles. Christ has redeemed both groups and accepted each of them equally. So we should accept each other the same way. We start out together in Christ and we should finish the Christian life together in Christ.

The Primary Principle of Unity

In verse 7 Paul begins with his theme of redemption as the great unifier. He starts with a clear challenge, "accept one another." This is not like receiving a new member into the church with a handshake or a hug. This is receiving a person to yourself. It is an emotionally intense receiving, not just a formality. Paul is saying, "Open your arms wide and embrace each other and count yourselves as members of the same body."

Jesus is the model for how we are to accept each other. In Romans 14:3, Paul says we are not to despise each other since God has received us all. There is the model again...as God has received us let us receive or accept each other. When we are having problems with fellow Christians we are to act as kindly toward them as God does toward us when we've done something wrong. He set the standard...it's ours to follow.

The motivation for obeying this standard is the glory of God. Our love and unity bring glory to God. When the world sees our good works, they glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). When our works are divisive, when our light is hidden because of our lack of love, the world does not glorify God. Instead, they make fun of us and mock our God. They don't believe what we say about the love of God because we don't manifest it in our own lives and churches.

The Personal Portrayal of Unity

In the beginning, the church was almost entirely Jewish. Then starting with God's revelation to Peter in Acts 10, Gentiles were saved and added to the church. Some of the Jewish Christian leaders were teaching that Gentile converts had to follow Jewish law in order to join the church. Paul fought for the principle that Gentiles should be accepted into the church on the basis of only one thing...their faith in Christ. The same is true today. God is not going to ask us what denomination or church we came from when we stand before Him. It's going to be all about Jesus...have we been redeemed?

Now the Bible does clearly teach the priority of Jews over Gentiles in receiving the Gospel. Some Gentile Christians were offended by this priority order but it is what the Bible teaches. "He came to his own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11)...and His own were the Jews. Then, "as

many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). To the Jew first...then to the Gentile.

The reason Jesus came first to the Jews is made clear by Paul, "so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed." He was born a Jew because of the promise of God that the whole world would be blessed through the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3).

It's important for us to understand that the salvation of the Gentiles was not an afterthought with God. It was part of His plan from the beginning that the Gospel would be available for all people.

The Powerful Promises of Unity

Paul goes on to prove that God has always intended that the Gentiles be included in the plan of salvation. He uses a number of Old Testament Scriptures that make reference to the Gentiles...one from the law, one from the prophets and two from Psalms.

The first quotation is from Psalm 18:49 where David says he will confess God's name among the Gentiles.

The second is from Deuteronomy 32:43 where the Gentiles are exhorted to praise God along with the Jews.

Next, the Gentiles are challenged to praise God on their own in a quote from Psalm 117:1. Interestingly, the Jews aren't even mentioned in this verse. First, the Gentiles listen to God being praised. Then they praise Him along with the Jews. Now, Paul shows how the Old Testament expected them to praise God on their own.

The last quotation is from Isaiah 11:10 where the prophet says that the Gentiles "shall hope" in the Messiah. There is a clear progression in the verses Paul quotes from the Old Testament. It is clear that God's plan all along was to include the Gentiles in His plan of redemption. There is no favoritism with God. His love is extended to everyone. God has included everyone in His redemptive love and forgiveness. So we are to accept each other just as God has accepted everyone, both Jews and Gentiles.

You cannot be a Spirit-filled Christian and have animosity toward another Christian. Why? Because God's love extends to all...and ours should as well.

The Passionate Prayer for Unity

Paul finishes this part of his message on unity in the church with a passionate prayer for unity. This is a prayer of blessing for all the believers in the church at Rome and one that we could easily pray for ourselves every day. The center of the blessing is the reality that God is a "God of hope." The God of hope doesn't expect us to hope as the world does, by trying harder and keeping a stiff upper lip. Hope without God is baseless. Without the God of hope, we are "without hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). Christian hope is an absolute certainty...an anchor that reaches into eternity and assures us everything is under God's control.

The character of the blessing is joy and peace...the result of knowing the God of hope. Joy is the active part and peace is the passive part. Joy is what you have when you know the God of all hope.

God's blessing is not partial...it is complete. The person being blessed by God is "filled" with joy and peace by believing. Paul uses the term "full" throughout his writings...fullness of joy, fullness of Christ, fullness of peace. He was totally aware of the fullness of God's blessing.

There is a correlation that goes with God's blessing...the more full of ourselves we are, the less room there is for the fullness of God's blessing. If we would stop trying to figure out how to find blessing in the human realm and seek it from God, we would receive all we would ever want.

The condition for receiving God's joy and peace is believing. That has always been the only condition for receiving God's blessings. When God made promises to Abraham in Genesis 15, "he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Fast forward a couple thousand years and Paul is saying the same thing...believe God's promises. The God of hope fills us with joy and peace as we trust Him.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is always the channel of God's blessing for the Christian. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit can we accept each other as Christ accepted us. Joy and peace come from the love which is the fruit of the Spirit.

Your church is filled with people who are different from you. Believe that the God of hope will fill you with joy and peace, and you will overflow with love toward them all.