

SINGING OUT OF THE SAME HYMNBOOK
ROMANS 15:1-13

BIG IDEA: THE CHURCH HAS GOT TO HAVE GOD-CENTERED UNITY

??WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE???

- I. IT LOOKS LIKE SERVANTHOOD. VERSES 1-4, *We who are strong [literally, “able”] ought to **bear** with the failings of the weak [literally, unable] and not to please ourselves.* ² *Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to **build** him up.* ³ *For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”* 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. Servants Bear. Verse 1, *We who are strong ought to **bear** with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*
1. Categorize Yourself
 - a. The Marks of a strong Christian
 - Biblically literate
 - Other-centered
 - Peacemaking
 - Knows when (and when *not*) to fight
 - Knows how to process the nuances of “gray” issues
 - Large-souled in disputatious matters
 - b. The Marks of a weak Christian
 - Biblically illiterate (or at least immature in *handling* the Bible)
 - Self-centered
 - Contentious and factious
 - Picks fights unwisely
 - Everything is “black and white”
 - Easily offended in disputatious matters
 2. Challenge Yourself
 - a. The strong are to limit their power for selfishness.
 - *Even in the Christian church they all too easily see it as unfair that their conduct should be modified on account of considerations that seem of no importance to them, even though those considerations form insurmountable problems for their weak brothers. They do not realize that their strength is given them in order that it may be used to help others.* [Leon Morris]¹
 - b. The strong are to [literally] *bear the weaknesses of the unable ones.*
 - This means more than just tolerating or putting up with someone.
 - The word “bear” ...*is used for carrying literal burdens (Mark 14:13); interestingly it is used for carrying the cross physically (John 19:17) and spiritually (Luke 14:27).*²
 - Moffat translation: *We who are strong ought to bear the burdens that the weak make for themselves and for us.*
 - There might be an allusion here to **Isaiah 53:4**, *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrow...*
- B. Servants Build. Verse 2, *Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to **build** him up.*
1. It’s not about me. Verse 3a, *For even Christ did not please himself*
 - a. It’s about “pleasing” my neighbor.
 - “Pleasing” isn’t always “pleasing” to the recipient.
 - What’s good for me isn’t always what I want—but it is what I really need. And someday I’ll have the wisdom to appreciate that.

¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 496.

² Leon Morris, Op. cit., 496-497 (footnote)

- b. It's about "building" my neighbor.
 - This word means properly, ...*the construction of a building, but in the New testament it is used in the metaphorical sense of building people up. It is mostly a Pauline conception (Paul has it 15 times out of 18 in the New Testament).*³
 - This is all about Christ-formation in people. Cf. Paul in **Galatians 4:19**, *My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...*
 - Tenderness toward the weak doesn't mean that the church should get stuck in simply catering to the immature scruples of the weak. Even as we treat the weak with dignity and kindness, we work to build their spiritual maturity. MORRIS: *[T]he weak, knowing that it would be wrong for them (thinking as they do) to do something that the strong do, all too easily hold that the strong are sinning and slip into condemning them. Not infrequently the weak is the greater tyrant.*⁴ (479)
- 2. It isn't easy. Verses 3b-4, *but as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."*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. Christ's objective was other-centered.
 - **Mark 10:45**, *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*
 - In context, Verses 1-4 are saying that a life-commitment to building others up spiritually is going to occasion some pain, and we need the lesson of Christ's suffering so that we, like him, will endure and be encouraged to persist in serving others.⁵
 - Ministry is messy. Like Linus once said, *I love humanity; it's people I can't stand!*
 - b. Christ's lifestyle was "cross-bearing."
 - Note OT quotation from **Psalms 69:9**, *for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.* [NIV text note: "you" refers to God and "me" refers to the righteous sufferer, whom Paul identifies with Christ. The quotation serves to show how Christ did not please himself, but voluntarily bore human hostility toward God.
 - They tried to throw Jesus off a cliff in Nazareth.
 - They said he was demon-possessed.
 - They said his miracles were powered by the Devil.
 - They badgered him with hostile trick questions.
 - They bad-mouthed him to everybody who would listen.
 - They beat him.
 - They crucified him and even as he hung on the cross, they mocked him.

II. IT LOOKS LIKE DISCIPLESHIP. VERSES 5-6,⁵ *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,*⁶ *so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

A. Jesus Is All about Unity. Verse 5, *a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus*

1. If we are authentic followers of Christ, it is logical that we will exhibit unity. "Follow"=lit., "according to"
2. If we profess to be followers of Christ, it is inexcusable if we do not exhibit unity. Cf. **John 17:20-23**, *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ 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.²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:²³ I in them and*

³ Leon Morris, op. cit., 490.

⁴ Leon Morris, op. cit., 479.

⁵ Murray says that Paul ...*adduces the example of Christ in his most transcendent accomplishments in order to commend the most practical duties.*

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.

- Jesus has perfect unity with his Father.
- He is our head and we are members of his “Body.”
- He is “in us.”
- If we are disunited, we are tearing his “Body” apart.
- If we are disunited, we distort the unity of the Trinity in the eyes of the world.
- Unity is sourced in God and it is to flow out through us in the world. **Ephesians 4:3**,
Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

B. Worship Is All about Unity. Verse 6, so that with **one heart and mouth** you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Disunity is incompatible with worship. **James 3:9-12**, *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*
2. Singing together in church (*mouth music*) must be accompanied by “singing” together during the week (*life music*).
3. Ravi Zacharias points out that, “It is impossible to worship God with a wrong motive.”⁶ Not that we don’t try—but God knows our hearts.
4. Jesus taught that authentic worship requires unity: **Matthew 5:23-24**, *“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”*

III. IT LOOKS LIKE A SAFE PLACE. VERSES 7-13, ⁷ **Accept one another**, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ⁸ *For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs ⁹ so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will **sing hymns** to your name.” ¹⁰ Again, it says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” ¹¹ And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.” ¹² And again, Isaiah says, “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.” 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.*

A. Jesus Made Heaven Safe for Me. Verse 7, *Christ has accepted you...*

1. Think of just how profound that is: *To be accepted by Almighty God.*
2. *When World War II broke out, the War Ministry in London dispatched a coded message to one of the British outposts in the inaccessible areas of Africa. The message read: “War declared. Arrest all enemy aliens in your district.” The War Ministry received this prompt reply “Have arrested ten Germans, six Belgians, four Frenchmen, two Italians, three Austrians, and an American. Please advise immediately who we’re at war with.”⁷*

B. I Am to Make Church Safe for Others. Verse 7, *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you*

1. The Jesus Protocol:
 - a. God accepted the patriarchs, i.e., made promises to (verse 8)
 - b. Jesus accepted the Jews [**lit., the circumcision**], i.e., became a servant of the Jews to confirm those patriarchal promises. (Verse 8)
 - c. Jesus accepted the Gentiles, i.e., by extended the covenantal blessing to the Gentiles (Verses 9-13)
2. The Christian Mandate:
 - a. The pastor needs it from the church members: Timothy-- **1 Corinthians 16:10-11**, *If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is*

⁶ Ravi Zacharias, *Cries of the Heart* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 210.

⁷ Grant Howard, *Balancing Life’s Demands*, 151.

carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. ¹¹ No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers.

- b. The church members need it from the pastor: Diotrephes-- **3 John 1:9-10**, *I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. ¹⁰ So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.*
- c. The church members need it from each other: Euodia and Syntyche-- **Philippians 4:2-3**, *I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

CONCLUSION:

A. "There is a tree...at the downhill edge of a long narrow field in the western foothills of the La Sal Mountains...a particular tree. A juniper. Large for its species - maybe twenty feet tall and two feet in diameter. For perhaps three hundred years this tree has stood its ground. Flourishing in good seasons, and holding on in bad times. 'Beautiful' is not a word that comes to mind when one first sees it. Not naturalist would photograph it as exemplary of its kind. Twisted by wind, split and charred by lightening, scarred by brushfires, chewed on by insects, and pecked by birds. Human beings have stripped...bark from its trunk, stapled barb wire to it in using it as a corner post for a fence line, and nailed signs on it on three sides: NO HUNTING; NO TRESPASSING; PLEASE CLOSE THE GATE. In commandeering this tree as a corner stake for claims of rights and property, miners and ranchers have hacked signs and symbols in its bark, and left Day-Glo orange survey tape tied to its branches. Now it serves as one side of a gate between an alfalfa field and open range. No matter what, in drought, flood, heat, and cold it has continued...at the greening tips of its upper branches and in its berrylike seed cones, there is yet the outreach of life.

"I respect this old juniper tree. For its age, yes. And for its steadfastness in taking whatsoever is thrown at it...Most of all I admire its capacity for...healing beyond all accidents and assaults. There is a will in it - toward continuing to be, come what may.

"Last night, I went for a walk in the darkness of early autumn to check and see if someone had remembered to turn the Milky Way on and the wind off. Drawn back to the cabin by the yellow glow of a reading lamp in the living room, I stood outside the window for a long time and looked in at my wife curled up on the couch sewing a hem in a new pair of wool trousers for me.

For seventeen years she has been my companion, my friend, my co-conspirator.

Yesterday, we were outraged at one another over something that seems trivial now, but the fire of anger is not quite cooled beneath the surface ashes. Yesterday, I made her cry in frustration. Yesterday, she was mad at me. I know I drive her crazy sometimes. She's not always easy to live with either. Yesterday, old grievances were flung off the shelf where they are sometimes shakily stored.

Yet today we walked up the road to pick sweet corn from a neighbor's patch and walked back down the road hand in hand in our usual way. We're good at forgiving. We have to be. The weather of love [and friendship] comes and goes, and we must let it. It is a required condition of loving [and befriending] and being loved back.

"And now, tonight, as I watch her through the window, I see her smile as she carefully fixes my trousers, perhaps thinking to make one leg slightly longer than the other in revenge.

"The gate we passed through to pick corn was the one attached to the old juniper. And the tree comes to mind this night as I look in on her. I long for the love [friendship] we have to always be like that tree. With a steadfast ability to take it - a capacity for.. healing and growing on, scars and all, come what may."

(From Robert Fulghum's book entitled, Uh Oh):

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