

34:21

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## Introduction

Well, before we jump into chapter 15, I want us to look back at chapter 14, and highlight what Paul told us there. If you remember from last week and chapter 14 in verse 13, Paul said this, "[Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore.](#)" (Rom 14:13) If you remember the context, from that verse there of what Paul's talking about, he's talking about gray areas in life, that we are not to judge anyone anymore on the gray areas in life. But what about those areas where the Bible is clear? What about those things that God tells us to do? And not to do? Are we allowed to judge others about those matters? Answer? Yes. Yes, we are.

So often we hear people, even within the church, they will quote Matthew 7:1. You all know it, "[Judge not, lest ye be judged.](#)" (Matt 7:1) Right? We hear that all the time. But what they fail to do, is they fail to continue reading and quoting Matthew chapter 7, which if you were to get down to verse 5, you continue reading in verse 5. And Jesus says, "[first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.](#)" (Matt 7:5)

First, you need to look at your own heart. And then when your own heart is right, then you go, and you can then take that speck out of your brother's eyes. So, you can go and judge -- you are to go and judge -- brothers and sisters in Christ. God is telling us that we are to judge our brothers and sisters, in

matters of sin, where the Bible is very clear. Black and white issues, not the gray area issues, but black and white issues, we are to judge one another.

When we see someone in sin, we are to confront them. And we're to call them to repentance. We're to judge them because they're walking out of line with what God has told us to do. And because sin separates -- their sin will cause them to be separated from God, and from His people. Because that's what sin does. Sin always separates. But calling someone to repent of their sin will bring them back. If they are repentant, it will bring them back to God's people, it will bring them back to God. And it will encourage them to be unified with God's people. Calling someone judging a brother or sister in Christ, over black and white issues, over issues of sin. When we call them to repentance, we are bringing unity to the church. Because sin always separates. We're to be unified as God's people.

So often, we think that if we judge another person who's in sin, that that's going to cause a fight, and bring disunity to the body of Christ. But when you think about it, their sin has already brought disunity, there is already disunity within the body of Christ because of that person sin. So, our job as loving brothers and sisters is to call them to repentance, so that they will repent and be restored to Christ and His church. And then there will be unity, unity within the body. And although this can be a hard thing to do, it's never easy to do, right? It's never easy to confront someone on their sin. But it's the loving thing to do. We do it out of a heart of love, because we love one another.

But in matters of gray areas where the Bible does not commend or condemn a certain thing, then we are not to judge our brothers and sisters regarding those issues. But were to love them were to live at peace with them. Were to consider them more important than ourselves. And to love them and serve them so that the church will be unified because that's what God wants for his church.

And that message here is going to be as we continue on in chapter 15 of Romans. He's going to continue to talk about this theme of unity. He wants unity within the church. And he wants to tell us about how you and I are to live together, as believers in Christ.

So, let's look at chapter 15, verses one through 13. And we'll break this up into two points.

- Point number one, we will call The Principles of Unity. The Principles of Unity.
- And then point number two, we will call The Picture of Unity. The Picture of Unity.

## **1. The Principles of Unity**

So, let's look at our first point here. The Principles of Unity. Now, as we work our way through verses 1-6, there are actually four principles that Paul is going to give us that we are to practice in order to bring about unity in the body of Christ. Four principles for us.

## Selfless Edification

Principle number 1, the first one is found in verses 1 & 2. And that is that we must practice -- selfless edification. We must practice selfless edification. Look at verse 1. *"Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not just please ourselves."* (Rom 15:1) Now, as a reminder, who are the strong in the church that he's talking about? These are the mature, the mature believers, those who are believers who understand the freedoms that we have in Christ, because of our knowledge of God's Word, we understand the freedoms.

But there are the weak in the church. The weak in the church are those who do not understand their freedoms. And so, they put a lot of rules and regulations on themselves, because they're fearful of disobeying Christ. These were the Jews and the Gentiles who would not eat meat sacrificed to idols, even though Paul says there really is no such thing as an idol, right? (Because there is only one God, so eat up.) But there were Jews and Gentiles who were fearful of eating meat sacrificed to idols, because they didn't want to go back to those religious systems. They didn't want to disobey God. These are the weak Christians. These are the baby Christians in the church, those who have not grown in their knowledge of Christ and His Word.

And so, Paul begins here by addressing -- notice who he addresses -- the strong Christians. He addresses the strong Christians again, who understand their liberties in Christ. And he tells the strong, the strong believers in the church, to bear the weaknesses of the weak. Notice what he says to the strong, not just that you "are" to bear the weaknesses of the weak, but that you "ought to" bear the weaknesses of the weak. That word "ought" there has the idea of "owing a debt to someone", or "having a strong obligation to that person." That is -- the strong in the church had the responsibility and the obligation to help the weak. To serve the weak. To care for the weak. To love the weak in the church, that word "bear" there means "to help carry" or "to pick up," which means it's the responsibility of the strong believers not to just tolerate the weak Christians, but to show love and respect toward the weak. Even though we may not agree with all of their practices, we must help them. We're to show consideration for their views, and not to argue about their rules that they have but were to love them and care for them as the weaker brothers sister.

Spurgeon said this, *"If any course of action, which would be safe to us, would be dangerous to weaker brethren. We must consider their infirmity and deny ourselves for their sakes."* You must deny ourselves for their sakes. As Paul says there, we are not to please ourselves. We're not to please ourselves. We're to consider our weaker brothers and sisters, and deny ourselves, because we love them. We love them. In fact, that's what Paul says in verse 2. *"Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification."* (Rom 15:2)

You know, we live in a self-centered culture, culture that's all about me. So, we talked about even a few Sundays ago... we were talking about Peter, right? You hear all kinds of psychological mumbo jumbo that is all about self. Self-esteem, self-confidence, self-trust, self-worth, self-image, self-love, and on and on it goes. You can add self-help. Most any word. It's all about me. We even have selfies now. Because everyone wants to see a picture of me. It's all about me.

But this is not what the Bible teaches. This is not what the Bible teaches. You and I love self too much. We love self too much. We need to think less of self and think more of others. We need to be others-centered, instead of self-centered. Now, that's what Paul is saying here in verse 2, essentially a reiteration of the second greatest commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself." Paul is dealing specifically here with things in which the strong believer wants to practice because of his freedoms in Christ. But because of his love for his neighbors, specifically here in this context, it's the weaker Christian. Because of his love for the weaker Christian, he will think of them, and serve them, and love them, and be willing to selflessly give up those freedoms in order not to offend the weaker brother.

But sadly, what happens in churches today is that the stronger Christian will act out selfishly and say, *"I have the right to do this. You can't tell me what to do. I have the right to do this. You can't tell me to stop doing this."* But what Paul is saying here is you need to put your freedoms aside -- notice -- for the good of your neighbor. Lay those down. Think about your neighbor. But not -- notice here -- not only for their good but also for their what? Their edification. For their edification. Edification here means "to build up" or "to make someone spiritually stronger." And it's the job of the stronger Christian, not to use his strength for his own edification, but to use their strength to build up the weaker Christian.

## Looking to Christ

How does this happen? By being selfless and thinking of them over yourself. There's a second principle for establishing unity in the body, and that is looking to Christ. The second principle is that we must be looking to Christ. Look at verses 3-4, *"For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME.'"* (Rom 15:3)

Christ is our example. He's the example. He's the one that you and I need to look to for how to establish unity in the body of Christ. What does Paul tell us about Christ? Notice this, *"He did not please Himself."* He did nothing for Himself. His attitude was always to please other people and ultimately to please the Father.

Philippians 2:5-8 says this, *"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,"* (But what did he do?" *"7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* Phil 2:5-8)

That was the attitude of Christ. He's the One that we need to look to. That's why Paul says, Paul, what he does here is he quotes Psalm 69 in verse 9, *"the reproaches of those who reproached You fell on me."* (Psalm 69:9) Because the example of Christ and what he went through in humble service for us. One commentator says, *"the approaches that were cast against God, the cursing, dishonor, unbelief, denial, hostility, all the shame and rebellion against God, cut the heart of Christ."* What Paul is telling us here, as he's quoting, Psalm 69:9 is that man hated God. And that is why they treated Christ the way that they treated Christ. They hated God, and who did they take it out on? Christ. The Jews hated God.

And they took it out on Christ. What Christ did in going to the cross was not a self-pleasing experience. He did it all in obedience to the Father, in order to serve us.

He is our example. He went through all the shame, and all the dishonor and all the hostility, because He loved us. In order to serve us. Therefore, when you and I have to give something up, in order to serve our fellow brothers and sisters, we shouldn't complain and have a selfish attitude of wanting to get our own way. But we should look to Christ, who gave up everything to serve us. He was treated poorly to serve us. He was willing to pay the cost to serve us. And we must look to Christ as the greatest servant, and model His attitude as we serve each other, and bring about unity in the church because that's what He desires in his church.

## We Submit to Scripture

There's a third principle that brings unity. And that is this that we Submit to Scripture, we Submit to Scripture. Look at verse 4, *"for whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction. So that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope."* (Rom 15:4)

Notice how Paul describes the Scriptures here. He says that they were written in earlier times. And even though they were written a long time ago, what does Paul say about them? They were written for whose instruction? For our instruction, sitting here today 2022. They were written for our instruction. So often, you'll hear people say, *"well, well, that's the Old Testament, or the Bible was written so long ago, or times have changed. So, the Bible isn't relevant. Those Bible writers didn't know what they were talking about. Were in 2022. Now, it's not relevant anymore."*

But Paul would say to them, it was written a long time ago, but it was written for our instruction, which means it's relevant for today. It's completely relevant for our day.

What is our job, then? We must submit to its teaching; we must submit to the Word of God. It's our authority. The Word of God is our authority. Because it's God's written revelation to us. It's written for our instruction. It's the truth. And our duty is to obey it. And listen, when all of us are obeying the Word of God together, you know what this brings? Unity. Brings unity.

Why do we need the Scriptures? Notice Paul goes on, *"because they bring perseverance and encouragement."* Whenever you're facing something, and you feel like giving up, look to God's Word, and He will help you to persevere, and encourage you to persevere in the faith. If you are ever at a point where you are feeling like I don't have anything left. I give up, go to God's Word, run to God's Word, run to the Scriptures, and God will give you the perseverance that you need. He'll give you the encouragement.

And He will also give you the what? *The hope.* He will give you the hope. Hope that when we keep believing in Christ and trusting in Him, then we will know for sure that our future will be glorious. Our future is glorious. When we look at the world around us and we see all the things that are going on. Don't put your hope in this world. It is failing. It is going down. It's because it's full of sin. But Christ is

victorious. Christ is our king. He is our hope. And He is the One that we need to look to. And how do we look to Christ? Through His Word. His Word that gives us hope. And when we are doing this together, when we are constantly going to God's Word together, that brings unity in His church.

## Bring Glory to God

Then there's a fourth principle. Fourth principle of unity is found in verses 5&6, and that is bring glory to God. Bring glory to God. Look at verse 5. "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be at the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice, glorify the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ." (Rom 15:5-6)

Paul here breaks into a benediction, a prayer for these Roman believers. And his prayer is that God will give them perseverance and encouragement. How does this happen? Well, we just saw in verse 4, through the Word of God, right? It happens through the Word of God. That's how God works. God works through His word. That's why we always go back here, always go to his word, because that's how God speaks to us. That's how He accomplishes His work -- through His Word.

## Initial summary

As we pursue unity with one another, being in His Word, the goal of this unity is not ultimately to please other believers, but it is to please who? It's to please God. That's our goal. We will be of one accord, and worship Him with one voice and bring glory to His name, as we come together to please God. That's always the goal in unity, right? That's the goal. Which means that as we are making decisions regarding gray areas with our brothers and sisters, the main question that we can ask is this, ask yourself, is this decision that I am about to make going to bring glory to God? Is this going to bring glory to God? If it is, make the decision, do it. But if it's not, then stop, stop. Rethink what you're about to do. So that you can make the right decision to bring glory to God, because that is the ultimate goal.

And when you are seeking to bring glory to God, you will have unity with your brothers and sisters. It brings unity. And so those are the principles for pursuing unity, selfless, edification, look to Christ, submit to Scripture, and bring glory to God.

## 2. The Picture of Unity

Let's look at our second point here tonight. And that is the Picture of Unity. Paul doesn't just give us principles, but he also gives us a picture of unity. First, we're going to see three of them.

First, we see the Picture of Christ. The Picture of Christ. Look at verse 7. "Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." (Rom 15:7)

## The Picture of Christ

Notice that, therefore, in verse 7. *Therefore* is a term of conclusion here. It's a term of conclusion. Paul is now concluding this whole section from chapter 14, verse 1 -- all the way to chapter 15, verse 6. In fact, what did he say back in chapter 14 verse 1? "[now except the one who is weak in faith.](#)" (Rom 14:1) And then what does he say here? In verse 7, "[Therefore, accept one another.](#)" (Rom 15:7) Accept one another. That's the command that you and I are to accept one another.

We are to accept one another -- notice this -- just as Christ also accepted us. Notice those two little words there "*just as*" -- just as; it's a term of comparison. That is, if Christ is willing to accept sinners, like us, into the family of God, how much more should we accept each other? When we look at the picture of Christ, who is the perfect, spotless, sinless Lamb of God, who has redeemed us and accepted us through repentance and faith. How much more should we sinners except other fallen brothers and sisters, who might not agree with us in gray areas?

As we've already said, when we do this, we bring glory to God. Just as Christ accepted us, and brings glory to God, If Christ has accepted us, how much more should you and I accept one another? And when we do this, it brings unity. Christ is the picture for us.

## The Picture of Jews and Gentiles

There's a second picture that Paul now gives of unity, and that is the picture of Jews and Gentiles. The picture of Jews and Gentiles. Look at verses 8 & 9, "[For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises \*given\* to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy.](#)" (Rom 15:8-9)

Now remember, Jews and Gentiles did they get along? No, they didn't. They hated each other, right? They didn't like one another. But God's plan and all along has been to save both Jews and Gentiles. To save both of them as His children. Notice what it says there in verse 8, "[that Christ became a servant to the circumcision.](#)" (Rom 15:8) Who is that? The Jews, he became a servant to the Jews.

If you remember Paul said in Romans 1:16, "[For I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.](#)" (Rom 1:16) What does this mean? Well, God revealed the truth to the Jews in the Old Testament first. They were the ones who received the truth of God. They were the ones who received His word, He chose them, and revealed Himself to them, and He gave them promises. And the Jews now see the truth of God confirmed in Christ, that is the Jews who believe -- they now see all of the promises that are there in the Old Testament, all of those covenant promises, they are all fulfilled in Christ. Because He fulfilled the law. And He confirmed the promises that were given to the fathers.



You see, when Jews hear the truth, and they understand who Christ is, and what He's done, their mind goes back to the Old Testament covenants. As a Jew, that's where their mind is going to go, because that's what they've been brought up with. And they can see those Jewish believers -- can see how Christ has confirmed those promises that God gave to the fathers all the way back in the Old Testament. He's confirmed all of them.

But notice the Christ didn't come for the Jews only. First, but not only. Because He also came for who? For the Gentiles. For you and I, and what do the Gentiles praise God for? For His mercy. We praise God for His mercy. As Gentiles, Gentile's minds don't go back to the Old Testament, because God didn't make any covenants with the Gentiles in the Old Testament. None. He didn't write the law to the Gentiles. Who did you write it to? To the Jews. Those covenants there in the Old Testament are for the Jews. But the Gentiles, they understand that although they are excluded from God, and living in sinful rebellion against God, that God by His mercy has saved them. As Gentiles, we understand and realize and recognize that God, by His mercy, has saved us. When we were living in complete rebellion against God, God by His mercy, saved us. That's true of all Gentiles. We praise Him for His mercy. But God's plan has always been to bring Jews and Gentiles together as His children.

Notice what Paul then does in verses 9-12. He then quotes the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. That is all three parts of the Old Testament, essentially a representation of the entire Old Testament. He is now quoting them, to show them this truth.

- In verse 9, he quotes David's words in Psalm 18. "As it is written, **"THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME."** (Psalm 18:49)
- In verse 10. He quotes Moses from Deuteronomy 32, which is the law. He quotes the Psalms, he quotes the Law in verse 10 **"REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE."** (Deut 32:43)
- In verse 11, he quotes the Psalms again. Psalm 117 **"PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM."** (Psalm 117:1)
- And then in verse 12, he quotes **Isaiah 11:10**, which is a part of the prophets.

You can see there, the Psalms, the Law, and the Prophets. The entirety of the Old Testament showing that God's plan all along was to save who? Gentiles, both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul's point here is that the entirety of the Old Testament has shown that God's plan has been to bring the Jews and the Gentiles together, together. So don't let your differences split you apart. You are to be unified in Christ, Jews and Gentiles are to be unified in Christ. And God's saving them is a picture of that unity that He desires for His church.

### Picture of Worship

And then third, and finally, there's a third picture that Paul gives of unity. And that is the Picture of Worship. The Picture of Worship. Look at verse 13. **"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound and hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."** (Rom 15:13)



Paul gives another benediction here in verse 13, a prayer of blessing on them, that God would fill them with joy and peace and hope. And he plays off of the hope that he talks about the Gentiles receiving at the end of verse 12. Notice what it says in the end of verse 12, *"In Him shall the Gentiles hope."* (Rom 15:12) Now he brings together both Jews and Gentiles.

And he says, *"Look, there is hope for you, both Jews and Gentiles. In Christ, you have hope."* The Gentiles hope in Christ. So, to the Jews, all those who are in Christ, hope in Christ, and are filled with joy, and peace. That is, we live a life of worship, right? We live a life of worship unto Him, we're filled with joy, because of what God has done for us. We rejoice together. You and I, we rejoice together.

You look at the world, do they have joy? No. It's a joyless place out there. But they should look at the Church of Christ, and they should go, "Wow! There's a lot of joy in that place." Why? Because we're unified in Christ. We worship Christ together. But notice this, we don't do it individually on our own. But notice how we do it. Notice this at the end of verse 13. We do it *"by the power of the Holy Spirit."* (Rom 15:13) By the power of the Holy Spirit. That is every believer has the Holy Spirit living in them, who unifies all of us together. Do you realize that? That all of us who are here tonight, who are believers, we all have the Holy Spirit living inside of us. We have been born again; we have been bought by the blood of Christ. There's great unity amongst us as we live by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Listen, don't let petty selfish desires bring disunity in the church. But may we live selfless lives and practice unity together. And may we do it all for the ultimate goal of bringing glory to Christ.

Father, we thank You for Your church, we thank You that You have built Your church. And I thank You for my brothers and sisters who are here, who are filled with the Holy Spirit, who have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. We have a bond, we have unity with one another, as Your children. Lord, I pray that You would bring unity to us -- that we would be a unified church. God, I pray that You would guard and protect us against the enemy who wants us to be disunified, and to fight and to argue amongst one another. God, I pray that You would humble us. Humble us and help us to live in unity with each other. Not so that we can bring glory to ourselves, but so that we can bring glory to Your name. We pray all of this in Christ's name. Amen.