

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
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## Unity for God's Glory

Romans 15:1-13

**Keywords:** strong, weak, unity, substitutionary atonement, love, hope.

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** NONE

**SermonAudio Blurb:** In this final message regarding the weak and strong brethren Pastor Henry shows why the pursuit of unity is so critical for the church. It is through unity that God is exalted by His people. Lack of unity evidences a improper understanding of the gospel. Therefore he gives six perspectives that must be kept in mind if the church is to have true, Christ-focused, God-exalting unity.

### I. Introduction.

- A. Read 15:1-13.
- B. Paul continues his discussion on the strong and weak in faith Christians.
  1. It is a conclusion of sorts.
  2. It concludes his entire teaching in 14:1ff.
  3. But also begins to tie up major themes that he has been teaching from the very beginning of the book.
- C. At the core of this section are two key passages:
  1. Vss 1-2.
  2. Vs 7.
- D. If we were to sum this section up it would be my title, "unity for God's glory."
  1. Unity is one of Paul's key expectations to the Church.
  2. In every letter Paul wrote you will see unity taught in a multitude of ways.
  3. Even in Philemon, where he sends back Onesimus.
    - a. Now a brother in Christ.
    - b. Appeals that Philemon would accept him as he would Paul.
  4. For the sake of unity he tells us to put up with one another and forgive one another as we were forgiven in Christ (Col 3:13).
  5. For the sake of unity he tells us to not seek only our own personal interests, and to regard one another as more important (Phil 2:3-4).

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6. And he reserves some of his hardest language for those who break up the unity of a church.
  - a. We are told to reject a factious person in Titus 3, calling that person perverted and self-condemned.
  - b. In Galatians he points out that those who are divisive and practice divisiveness are showing evidence of not truly even being saved.
- E. But unity is something that is more easily talked about than it is practiced.
  1. Requires right theology.
  2. And the right perspective which flows from that theology.
  3. Paul has given us 14 chapters of theology. And here he begins to tie it all up nice and neatly regarding unity.

***Propositional Statement***

Today I want us to explore how we can grow in unity. In this passage we have **Six perspectives** that are founded in deep, sound theology and if held onto will move us toward proper unity. Six perspectives that will promote unity at MDF.

**II. Six Perspectives that Promote Unity:**

- A. First perspective is to look out for those weaker than you (1a).
  1. There is something very wrong when you see stronger people exploit the weak.
  2. Remember what is meant here by being “strong.”
    - a. It is a person who has come to really understand how free he is in Jesus Christ.
    - b. That the gospel has freed him from the Law and its burdens. That there is nothing unclean in itself and that he may enjoy all of creation as a good gift from the Lord.
    - c. Therefore food and drink and days are unimportant in themselves, they simply are gifts from the Lord.
  3. The bible is clear that we are to bear one another’s burdens.
    - a. In James he describes true religion as caring for the orphan and the widow.

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- b. In the Old Testament that is explicitly stated over and over, with dire warnings to those who harm the helpless.
- c. When a lawyer was talking to Jesus and asked, “who is my neighbor?” And it was there that Jesus gave the parable of the good Samaritan.
  - (1) The priest and Levite both avoid the man.
  - (2) The Samaritan showed real compassion.
- 4. And in our passage he sums up all that he taught in chapter 14 and says to the strong, bear the weaknesses . . . .
  - a. If the strong can cause the spiritual ruin of a weaker brother, then have nothing to do with that!
  - b. Notice that he labels himself as one of the “strong.”
- 5. It is the obligation of the strong to do so.
  - a. In the emphatic position.
  - b. Being strong in your faith brings responsibility.
  - c. It is the only proper response and it is the expectation of our Lord that the strong help the weak.
  - d. All who are strong in their faith are indebted to those who are weak to help them—not exploit them, nor mock them, nor complain or any other thing.
- 6. And notice also that we are not merely getting along with the weak; rather, we are to come alongside and bear his weaknesses.
  - a. We are to make his weakness ours.
  - b. We are to lift it on our shoulders and own it.
  - c. The word, “bear” does not mean merely to endure. Rather it speaks of supporting and helping.
  - d. Much like in 14:1 where he says that we are to accept the weak.
  - e. It is used of our Lord in Matthew 8:17 where it is written that Jesus bore our diseases.
  - f. In Galatians 6 it is bearing one another’s burdens.

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- g. And as those of us who are strong learn to bear the weaknesses of others we are merely living out the gospel in a very practical manner.
  - h. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.
    - (1) Point out how Paul, for the gospel's sake, takes on other's convictions.
    - (2) Point out how this is living under "the law of Christ" (21).
- B. Second perspective is to see less value in your own desires and pleasures (1b-2).
- 1. The word "please" deals with our pleasures, the things that satisfy us.
    - a. In this context it would be having a work day on the Sabbath, or cooking for a church meal and making pork only because you like it.
    - b. At the center of this is yourself, not the weaker brother and certainly not the Lord.
    - c. We see this is that well known passage in Philippians 2 which I have referred to.
      - (1) Turn there.
      - (2) Point out also vs 19-21.
        - (a) Sad words.
        - (b) And isn't it still true today in too many situations?
        - (c) It is far easier to find those who live for themselves in the church than those who don't.
        - (d) What is your reputation? Would Paul send you?
  - 2. 1 Corinthians 10:32-33 uses this word and again in the context of our freedoms.
  - 3. We set our freedoms and rights aside when we see that by doing so we can help strengthen and enlarge the faith of others. This is verse 2.
    - a. This is all of our's responsibility.

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- b. It is the mutual building up of one another. It is the essence of disciple-making.
  - c. Ask yourself if what you are doing in the presence of another is moving him or her to edification or harming his faith.
  - d. Ask yourself how you are building that person up.
  - e. Don't ask, "What is wrong with it?" But ask, "What is edifying about it?"
- 4. 1 Corinthians 13:5 reminds us that true love does not seek its own.
  - 5. And this nicely flows into the third point....
- C. Third perspective keep Jesus as your only real example (3).
- 1. This perspective and the final one (unity glorifies God, vs 6) are the two key perspectives.
    - a. If these are grasped and held close to our hearts, then MDF will be a unique place.
  - 2. Remember that attitude in Philippians 2? Paul then immediately points us to Jesus.
  - 3. This is the only way your are going to want to bear the weaknesses of other over the long haul.
    - a. There will always be someone weak in their faith in your life.
    - b. And you will weary of caring for them, bearing their burdens if Jesus is small to you.
  - 4. Notice what part of Jesus that Paul focuses on, his substitutionary sacrifice.
    - a. Explain this.
    - b. It is interesting to note that Paul writes it this way, "For even THE Christ...."
      - (1) Emphasizing His exalted position as the anointed One of God.
      - (2) If the Christ/ the Messiah was willing not to please himself, then how much more ought His servants?

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- c. He took our shame, our sin, and our punishment for the sake of the glory and honor of His Father.
  - (1) That was his motivation, the glory of God through the saving of sinners.
  - (2) And if you really are “strong” then you will readily accept this.
  
- D. Fourth perspective is to submit yourself to the Scripture (4).
  - 1. This is a parenthetical point that he is making.
  - 2. To not know the Scripture is to be weak. That is a guarantee.
  - 3. But to know the Scripture and not submit yourself to it is rebellion. As James says, “to know what is right to do and not do it is sin.”
  - 4. Both of these situation are not acceptable.
    - a. We are not to be ignorant, but we are not to be non-doers either.
    - b. We are to learn the Scriptures so that we might do the Scriptures.
    - c. Part of the act of disciple-making in Matthew 28 is teaching them to obey all that Jesus commended.
      - (1) Not just know the commands.
      - (2) But to do the commands.
      - (3) And if these are done there are great blessing that come.
  - 5. Notice the three purposes he gives about the bible.
    - a. To instruct us.
      - (1) Of God.
      - (2) Of Man.
      - (3) Of how we can know God and be right with God.
      - (4) Of the end of all things.
    - b. To give us perseverance.
      - (1) Remember that quote from last week by Jerry Bridges?

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- (2) One key way we can persevere in our faith is the daily intake of God's word.
  - c. And to encourage.
6. And the result? Hope.
  - a. God-centered, Christ-focused, Spirit-empowered hope.
  - b. A hope that endures.
  - c. A hope that turns our eyes away from the here and now to the age that is to come.
  - d. Where God makes all things right. Where justice and righteousness flows.
  - e. Where our sorrow is changed into joy.
  - f. Where sin and death are cast away forever.
7. How do we have this hope? The Scriptures.
  - a. If your reading of the Scripture does not produce this then there is something wrong with how you are reading it.
  - b. As Tom Schreiner says it, "Something is wrong if one only studies the Scriptures academically and does not regularly receive nourishment and strength to live the Christian life. The purpose of the Scriptures is that believers should have 'hope.' Once again, the immensely practical role of the [bible] in the lives of Christians is unfolded. Hope is generated through carefully reading, understanding, and obeying the [bible]." (Pg. 748)
- E. Fifth perspective is to know that it is a gift of God (5).
  1. Paul has given them a chapter and a half on this issue. There is nothing more for him to say.
  2. And here he acknowledges that self-denying, weaker brother loving is a gift of God.
  3. Ultimately it is God who must move us.
  4. This is not an either/or issue. But a both/and.

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- a. Don't think that you can say that you don't have a desire to help the weak with their weaknesses, so until God acts you are free.
  - b. All Christians are commanded repeatedly in the bible to strive for unity.
  - c. He knows what the church is to look like and he knows that it is God who shall accomplish it.
5. And so he gives this prayer/wish in the midst of it all.
- a. Paul is not asking for unanimity on all issues.
  - b. It is unity that is the desire. That the strong and weak will accept one another even though there are differences and struggles.
  - c. That for the sake of the gospel they shall strive together to live out a life of love toward one another.
  - d. This is how we ought to be praying for MDF.
- F. Sixth perspective is to grasp that unity glorifies God (6-12).
1. If this is your consuming desire then you will joyfully and with great vigor bear the weaknesses of others.
  2. This is where authentic worship comes in.
    - a. God is not pleased with worship that is a bunch of voices saying the same thing but with divided hearts.
    - b. Rather, it is when true unity is prevailing in the church and out of that unity we lift up our voices and we sing and pray and speak all things to God's glory.
  3. Vss 8-12 are written to show this church in Rome that God's plan and love has always been for both the Jew and the Gentile.
  4. Vs 7 he shows that in doing this we are showing that we are following Jesus' example.
    - a. Vs 8 is Jews.
    - b. Vs. 9 is Gentiles.
    - c. Vss. 10-11 is both Jew and Gentiles.



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- d. Vss. 12 is focused on the Gentiles.
5. Quotes from Law, Psalms, and Prophets—this is a great and unifying message of the Old Testament—God would raise up a people for His Name’s sake from every nation, tribe and tongue.
6. And what is the focus?
  - a. Vs. 9 “...praise to Thee....”
  - b. Vs. 10 “Rejoice, O Gentiles, WITH His people.”
  - c. Vs. 11, “Praise the Lord.....Let all the peoples praise Him.”
7. Jesus Christ came and redeemed a people that is very diverse.
  - a. Different languages.
  - b. Different cultures.
  - c. Different standards.
  - d. But all were brought to the equal ground at the Cross.
  - e. And all are called to stand in unity, and with a unified voice, glorify their Father in Heaven.
8. When both the Jew and the Gentile, the slave and the free, the male and the female find their hope in Jesus, then unity with prevail.

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. Vs. 13 is a benediction.
- B. Now he is asking God to do this, for it is His will.
- C. As Jesus said in Matthew 6:10, “Thy kingdom come. They will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.”

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## Small Group Questions

- Which of these perspectives is most encouraging to you?
- How has perhaps the lack of unity harmed worship in the church?
- How does focusing first and foremost on the gospel promote true unity?