

Romans 15:1-13

“One Mind And One Mouth”

The Scriptures declare, “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!*” Ps 133:1 In that not only is it something that’s precious, and not only is it something that refreshes us, but the Psalmist goes on to tell us that it’s like the cherished oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. and As you well know as a general rule the scriptures always typify oil as a picture of what? An anointing; there’s a sweet and unique anointing that covers a body of believers collectively (from head to toe) as we assemble in the spirit of unity. Unity, that’s been the overall emphasis that Paul has been laying out practically for us in this portion, this passage of scripture that we’ve been studying the past couple of weeks.

Because when it comes to personal opinions in the body of Christ over gray areas, areas of uncertainty, areas that the scriptures don’t speak to specifically, areas that are neither commanded nor condemned clearly, (and we’ve used examples like tattoos, piercings, hairstyles, or clothing style, we’ve spoken of various outlets entertainment wise... and there’s many others but that communicates the idea). Well, in areas like that there is tremendous liberty extended to each and every believer individually. (Certain diets, various days of the year, different kinds of music), but leave it to our enemy, the great dragon, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world. Leave it to him to take these great and precious truths of the scripture that were meant to enable us to receive one another, to walk in harmony with one another, to love *on* one another and somehow twist them so as to set us *against* one another. Because since God has allowed us such tremendous liberty, there are those who’ve chose the safety and security (in their own mind) of self imposed rules and regulations, what they would consider to be safeguards. and So they take a very conservative approach to their walk and relationship with the Lord.

But others are blown away by the liberty with which Christ has made them free and so they enjoy their freedoms to the full, oh not taking matters to an unhealthy/spiritually compromising level, but it doesn’t bother them to see a movie that’s not obviously immoral. It doesn’t bother them to dress in a non-provocative but cutting edge type style, perhaps they do crazy things with their hair and have a tattoo or 3, and even have their tongues pierced. It doesn’t bother them to eat whatever is set before them and they don’t see any day as more holy, or another as less holy, 24hrs on the clock, is 24 hrs on the clock.

The beautiful thing about it all is that God has received both people, both love the Lord, have given their hearts *to* the Lord, are open to correction *from* the Lord and in that we *ought* to rejoice, and receive one another. But instead what happens so often is that those who are weaker in their walk (no not the liberated one, but according the scriptures it’s the legalistic one who’s weak).

We would think that the more mature would perhaps lead a bit more ascetic lifestyle, doing this, not doing that. But that's not what the bible teaches; the one who's weak maintains his/her self-imposed guidelines of godliness, regulated righteousness through maintaining a standard that the bible never insisted or even intended. (and Again we're speaking in regard to gray areas, not obviously immoral or sinful behavior as spoken of clearly in the scriptures, that's for all of us with out exception). But those who are weak have a tendency to judge those who enjoy their liberty as being out of control and disrespectful to the ways and will of God, as to where those who are strong have a tendency to disdain and look down on the weak as being self righteous legalists.

So what God has meant to be a means to bring us all together in unity, our flesh, and through spiritual warfare the enemy has used these things to be a means of disharmony, dissension and division in the body of Christ. So we have Romans 14 which deals in detail with these matters. and Here's the overall thrust, you who are weak, don't judge your bro/your sister who enjoys their freedom, you who are strong, don't look down, and show contempt for your bro/sister that's more conservative. God has received both, we both want to please God, God sustains us both, and neither of us will have to give an account for the other. So let's not be a burden to one another, but rather let's be a blessing to one another. Don't flaunt your freedoms, and don't ensnare anyone else in your own personal opinion. Pursue the things which make for peace and the thing by which one may edify another.

Now these 1st 13 Vs of Ch 15 finish up the flow of thought concerning these things and is still continuing where Ch 14 ended placing the primary emphasis of keeping the unity upon the strong (which only makes sense). Because in reality we're to remember that the focus isn't to be placed upon one another, but upon Jesus Christ and the fact that there are people plummeting into the pit of hell everyday. So rather than taking the time to fault find and slam on the saved, let's get on our faces and intercede for the lost, we're to be about sharing the gospel, not goading one another. and So we read.

Vs 1

So much like in Vs 14 of Ch 14 Paul places himself in the category of the strong, he'd been a legalistic Pharisee before he'd met Christ, but Jesus had set him free from all that stuff. But he realizes that not everyone is where he's at, not everyone is where *you're* at, so then (you who are strong) what's your responsibility to the body of Christ with regard to those who are of a weaker disposition spiritually than you are? You are - I am to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Now its important to understand something here, because if you just hear that, but don't really search out the context *surrounding* that you're kind of left thinking, "Well, I guess that we're forever bound to be ruled by the whims of the weak, that the body of Christ will be ruled by its weakest member and we all have to bow, have to acquiesce to their standard. We're only as strong as the weakest link." I suppose that to a degree there is a bit of truth in some of that, and I'll explain what I mean by that but what I want you to realize is that this Vs isn't simply teaching tolerance. That we need to put up with the weak, there where it's been translated "Bear *with*" that's sort of unfortunate and not every translation renders it that way because that lends itself to tolerance, putting up with them and that's that. We're forever to be bound by the whims of the weak with no hope of escape or excelling beyond that point. But the idea behind that word "bear" is to "bear *up*" as opposed to bear *with*.

That is, we're to come alongside of them, bear their burdens with them, but that's to be a means to help them and foster growth *in* them. The weak isn't always to remain weak, we spoke about that last week in the illustration of my 3 kids all being at different ages and maturing in different ways, but in a year from now they won't be where they're at today, they'll have grown, matured moved beyond the limitations they struggle with now. So to in the body of Christ.

It's like that old joke about the 2 guys enjoying a day in the woods when they come face to face with a momma grizzly bear guarding her cubs. and They sit there in total shock, in complete silence just staring at this bear face to face. When after a few minutes one slowly begins to take off his hiking boots and put on his tennis shoes. The other fella whispers to him, "What are you doing, don't you know a grizzly bear can out run you?" and The other guy says, "Yeah, but all I have to do is out run *you*."

But that's the way we sometimes think in the body of Christ, "I've been set free, I can run as fast and as hard as I want, and if you get eaten up, taken down, or done *in* on account of it that's your problem." and Though that philosophy might work in the woods, it doesn't fly in the fellowship. The bible is clear, "...*if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it;*" 1 Cor 12:26 That's what I was referencing a moment ago, there's truth to the fact that how the weakest among us is doing individually, will influence and have an affect upon you, and upon me directly. God has set up the structure of His body so that we have to be mindful of one another, it's important that I slow down in my freedoms, lay off if necessary in my liberties in order to take into consideration those who may not be as strong or as free in their own heart and mind.

Now remember that we're not speaking about catering to the legalist for the simple sake of satisfying their legalism, neither Paul nor Jesus did that. But that we need to be sensitive to the learning curve of the sincere who may be struggling over a certain idea, or a particular practice. To the Thessalonians Paul put it like this, "*Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.*" 1 Thess 5:14

We're to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ, the law of love, we're not in this thing simply for ourselves, we're not to please ourselves to the detriment or downfall of another. The bottom line is found in this last clause of Vs 1, we're not to be self-centered, and that applies to both the weak and the strong. The call of the Christian is to *deny* ourselves, the world tells you to look out for #1, the *Word* tells you that's ok as long as *you're not #1*. It's like the acronym for J.O.Y. Jesus 1st yourself last, others in between, that's the biblical order.

Vs2

You see there it is, it's that straight forward/simple, yet challenging call to place others as a priority over yourself, over myself. "Let each of us please his neighbor," it's much like what Paul wrote when he said to the Philippians, "*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*" Phil 2:3-4 and So the thought here is that we're not to be self-centered, but others-centered. But understand that simply pleasing my neighbor; that is, whoever it is that I happen to be around isn't the end in itself, it's a means and it's to be (notice) *for his good*. This is not a carte blanche command to simply do what you need to do to be pleasing to another.

There's a qualification here that demands some discernment on your part. It's to be "for his good." It's to "lead to edification," a building up as opposed to a tearing down. Or to understand that another way, there is a *limit* that *love* imposes. Because if you were to come to me and make known to me that what would really be pleasing to you would be for me to go by you a 12 pack of beer; well, I'm sorry I'm not going to be very pleasing to you because I can't see biblically how that makes for your good, or leads to your edification. The Holy Spirit is not calling us here to be "man pleasers" as such, just doing what you gotta do to be pleasing to your friend, or that person whether it's good for them or not. But we are to seek to be pleasing to one another in ways that are good for each other, that builds up and edifies one another. We're too often about the business of picking apart and tearing down one another when in reality we're called to build up and strengthen each other.

Let me toss it to you from another angle, why do you come to church? Is it to get everything you can, or is it to give everything you can? Is it about what's pleasing *to you* or are you looking for ways to please others, to build up others? Do you come in thinking, "Jeff better be on today because last weeks study was a real dud and if it keeps up like this I'm going to have to find somewhere else to go to church." Or, "That worship team is always too loud, the children's ministry just isn't up to par, the greeters didn't even smile at me." If so I got news for you, you're all about you. Now do I want you to be well fed? Yes, do we desire create an atmosphere that's conducive to your worship? You bet, is it our desire to meet the needs of each child, and greet you at the door with the love of Jesus Christ? Of course, but what I'm trying to communicate is that I'm not to be looking for what I'm able to get but rather how I can give. Get here 15 minutes early, stay 20 minutes after service and just see who you can find who may need prayer, or that you might encourage or offer a word to from the scriptures.

Don't be self consumed, and all about what pleases you, but rather how you can be pleasing to others, if you see a need, pray about it, avail yourself to it, be apart of the solution rather than simply pointing out every problem. and Of course I just used the fellowship as an example, but that's to be the general thrust of our lives as believers, others oriented. Notice

Vs3

Everything about Christ, from the beginning of His mission in laying aside His glory in Heaven to become a Man on this earth, to the culmination of the cross was *other's* oriented. He did *nothing* from a self-centered perspective. How did it benefit *Him* personally to become a Man laying aside certain aspects of His attributes as God? How was it self-centered or personally beneficial for Him to be made sin for us, or bear our infirmities, or to shed His blood, and be nailed to a cross? Christ didn't live His life to please Himself, but to please His Father and to serve others. We read of Christ in Ps 40 where it says, "*Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.*" Ps 40:7-8 Jesus said, "*For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*" John 6:38 Even in the garden on the eve before His crucifixion He said, "*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*" Matt 26:39 and Of course Paul tells us in Phil Ch 2 that being found in appearance as a Man He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Jesus said, "I always do those things that please the Father." and As for how He utilized His life while on earth what did He say? "*For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.*" Luke 22:27 He said, "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" Mark 10:45 and He told us that no student was above His master, but that it was enough for the student to even be *like* his master. We're to emulate Christ.

That is we're to obey the Word of God, we're to give our lives away to the benefit of others, even those weaker among us though it might cost us personally. That's what Paul is communicating in quoting from Ps 69, it cost Christ tremendously by choosing to not please Himself personally. Now He didn't cater to legalism, there He was on the Sabbath in the temple and He saw a man with a withered hand. and He looked at the Pharisees who seeing Him prepared to heal a man had asked, "Is it lawful to heal a man on the Sabbath?" He said, "Who among you having a sheep fall in a pit on the Sabbath won't lay hold of it and help it out? Now what's of more value, a sheep, or a man? So you tell Me, *is it* lawful for a man to do good on the Sabbath?" and He told the man to stretch out his hand and He healed him right there on the spot.

Now there was another time when He was challenged with regard to paying temple tax, and those who receive it said to Peter, "Does your Teacher pay temple tax?" Peter said, "Of

course He does.” and Jesus looked at Peter and said, “What do you think, Simon? Do the kings of the earth take taxes from their sons or from strangers?” Peter said, “Strangers.” Jesus said, “Then the sons are free. Nevertheless lest we offend them go to the sea and throw in a line and the 1st fish you take out look in its mouth and you’ll find a piece of money, take it and pay for you and Me.”

Jesus was in essence saying, “I’m tax exempt. But lest we offend them pay it anyway.” and So there were times of confrontation and exhortation, and other times of sensitive consideration, when do you exercise which approach? That’s the beauty of a personal relationship with Jesus, it’s like He left these broad principles in His Word and then says, “See Me for further instruction, for specific application to this given situation.” We’re to walk *with* the Lord, seek daily direction *from* the Lord. and There are times for gentle consideration, and other times when the situation may call for tender confrontation, and some healthy exhortation. James said, “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*” James 1:5 So in that moment that you’re seeking to discern how to handle a certain situation, utter a prayer silently, ask God for wisdom and guidance as to how to handle that circumstance specifically right then and there, then move forward according to your conviction in love.

Vs4

The scriptures, both OT and New were written for our learning, that we might be strengthened in both endurance and encouragement resulting in hope, the guaranteed certainty of a fruitful, God glorifying end. When you read of guys like Noah, Ab, Moses, and David how they forewent what would please themselves in consideration of others, and how God blessed that, and did amazing things through that, how they inherited the promises through patience and faith. That serves to strengthen you, strengthen me to endure, to be encouraged to let God have His will done His way in my life, to use my life as a vehicle through which others might be served and blessed.

Vs5-6

We’ve spoken about the means, this is the ultimate end; unity in the body of Christ. That we might be like minded toward one another, not according to me, or my standards, or your standards, but according to Christ, He’s the standard. and What’s the aim, what’s the end? That we might with 1 mind, and 1 mouth *glorify* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Something happens when we gather corporately, collectively as a body and go through the Word of God, there’s a oneness, a like mindedness that begins to take place.

Oh we may vary a bit on application or interpretation, but there’s an overall unification that takes place as by the Spirit of God through the study of the Word of God. Which is another reason why its so critical not to forsake that gathering together of the saints (Heb 10:25).

Because if you've ever known someone who has pulled away from fellowship, kind of isolated from involvement and interaction with the body, they slowly but steadily seem to lose that sense of oneness, they're no longer really with us or apart *of* us. and I'm not saying that they don't love the Lord, or that they're not saved, but there's that loss of unity, a vulnerability that they open themselves up to that the enemy loves to take advantage of. We're not to divide, or pull away, we're to be one heart, one mind, and one mouth glorifying the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

Now before we pick up the pace I want you to notice a little phrase there in Vs 5, "The God of patience." We're so often in a hurry, but we serve a God of patience, we find ourselves wanting God to hurry up. Oh we're thankful that He's a God of patience when it comes to His *people*, I need all the patience He can give me. But at times I'm frustrated that He's a God of patience when it comes to His *plan*, but understand that regarding both His *people* and His *plan* He is patient. So it's not that He needs to hurry up, it's that I need to grow in patience. and We need to be patient with one another as God is dealing with us, challenging and changing us.

Vs7

This is one of those Vs we could spend lots of time on, but we won't. But notice how Paul is really holding up Christ before us as the ultimate illustration and exhortation *to us*. In Vs 3 "Even Christ," in Vs 5 "According to Christ, and here in Vs 7, "Just as Christ." I want you to take a moment and think this one through, how did Christ receive you? How did He receive me? with conditions or reservations? After I got my act cleaned up? When I finally came to see everything exactly like He does? Or was it graciously, whole heartedly, unreservedly, joyfully, willingly, compassionately, with every fault and frailty with in me... just as I am? Now, how is it that we're to receive one another? Just as Christ received us. and Jesus said, "*He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.*" Matt 10:40 Now listen, if in my receiving you I receive Christ, what does it mean if I reject or resent you? If it's really true that what we do unto the least of these My brethren we do to Christ, how sobering ought that to be? You see, God help us that we might receive one another as Christ received us. Eph 4 tells us that we're to *forgive* one another as God in Christ has forgiven us, and of course Jesus told us that we're to love one another as He has loved us. In short its never about us, it's Christ in us, Christ is all and in all, we're to decrease that He might increase in our lives.

Vs8-12

Now all this is still serving to undergird the fact that we're to receive one another. Both Jew and Gentile, legalist and liberated. Paul quotes from the law, from the psalms and from the

prophets, he speaks from Moses, from David, and from Isaiah and it's all pointing out the fact that though Christ came to and through the Jews that God had always intended both Jew and Gentile to be received. Vs 9 is a quote from Ps 18 and it's a pointing to Christ Himself singing praises to God among the Gentiles, Isaiah speaking to the fact that He'll rule and reign *over* the Gentiles as well, that our hope, that confident anticipation and assured expectation of salvation would rest in Him. No need to divide over debatable things, we can come together in Christ, abide on the common ground of praise to our God, for He is worthy of all that we are.

Vs13

Not only is our God the God of patience, but He's the God of hope, you can rest assured that He will fulfill all of His Word, that in Christ your salvation is certain and it is complete. In Titus Paul refers to this hope as a "Blessed hope" Peter informs us we've been called to a "Living Hope" and here we're seeing that it's an "Abounding hope." A superfluous, overly exceeding, more than enough to spare kind of hope. and So may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, in your trust in Him, that you might have an overflow of confident expectation and the guaranteed realization of the promise of His salvation, and sanctification in your life individually, and of the unification of the body collectively by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer Points: God we appeal to You on that level, of filling our hearts with all joy and all peace in believing, that we might just abound in hope by the power of Your Holy Spirit. We thank You that You've received us in Your Son by simple faith *in* Your Son, Now God may we be gracious to one another, receiving one another as Christ received us. and Lord may we take after Your example by the power of Your Spirit being others oriented, not self consumed, but looking for avenues to give of Your love, and be blessing to our brothers and sisters in You. That we not tear down, but build up and edify one another.

I want you to be assured that if you've never surrendered your heart to Christ that He's willing to receive you today. Just as you are, you don't have to clean your act up, meet any conditions, or jump through any hoops. Jesus said all that the Father gives Me will come to Me and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. Come to Christ, He'll receive you, He offers forgiveness *to* you and everlasting life. Jesus shed His blood upon the cross so that you might be forgiven of all your sin and washed white like snow before the throne, it's a simple transaction of faith. Believe in Him and He'll robe you in His righteousness, make you brand new.