

## Romans 15

Romans 3:1-20

Romans 2:21-31

Responsive, Psalms 20

This morning we will be back in chapter 15 of Romans, looking primarily at verses 7-13. But before we dive in I want to just take a moment this morning to remind of a few things from earlier in this chapter. So let's go ahead and read, ( verse 1-13 ) Paul has been really doubling down on the idea and concept of Christian Unity, but not only what that should look like, but also how to attain it. This would have been one of the major issues the early church was being faced with since in many places, like Rome the congregation would be made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Coming from such a starkly different background would create schisms and areas of contention between these 2 groups. We humans are by nature a tribal people, but that I mean we largely operate, function, and exist within group who closely align to ourselves. We gather around like interests, hobbies, political affiliations, we look at these various different tribes, or groups to find which ones we as individuals will most likely fit into.

And even when we are looking for a gathering of believers to align ourselves with, we assess their beliefs, doctrines, and statements to see if they align with what we believe. There is nothing inherently wrong in this practice of seeking where we may fit in, especially when it comes to being involved in a local church body for it is important to find a place in which we can live in, and experience this type of Christian Unity that Paul has been instructing the Roman church in. What Paul has been setting forth is the standard, the goal in any church, for people from all walks of life, from all different backgrounds to come together in faith and belief and find a sort of supernatural unity among those that God puts together. Before the early church, there was a dividing line drawn between the Jew and the Gentile. The Jews were given the word of God, and God worked directly with their ancestors and fathers making promises and prophecies, Paul wrote back in chapter 3 of this book, that this was a great advantage to them, for they had the word of God and his nature had been revealed to them, and the law was given so they may understand their need for a Messiah who was promised would come. Over the generations the Jewish people became haughty, prideful, and arrogant, they were God's special chosen people, therefore all others were worthless and unworthy of respect and little better than an animal.

That was the mindset of the Jew in the time of Christ, and during the rise of the early church. But something had happened, a change was made, Christ came, the promised Messiah who was spoken of all the way back in the earliest of books, and he fulfilled the redemption of his people by his own blood, becoming the very thing that all the rituals, sacrifices, and even the law pointed to. The perfect and holy spotless lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. The special revelation that was given to the Jews before, was now being given to all of mankind, gentiles were believing, turning away from their idols and paganism and false Gods, and believing on this one, Jesus who died and rose again. No longer was the word of God revealed only to the physical descendants of Abraham, but to all people, and especially to those who are the spiritual descendants of Abraham by faith. We read this morning in Romans 9, "it is not as if the word of God has taken no effect, For they are not all Israel who are Israel, nor are they all children because they are of the seed and offspring of Abraham; but in Isaac your seed shall be called. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, the physical descendants of Abraham, these are not the children of God; but the children of promise are counted as the seed, the offspring, the descendants"

This is a much different message than the Jews had heard for generations, now you have this Paul guy, and other Disciples and followers of this Jesus saying that their inheritance through Abraham is nothing? Instead the promise is fulfilled in Jesus, and all who believe and come to him are the promised offspring of Abraham, generations of people brought together by faith and belief, through the promise of God. And this is where the breakdown has occurred between the Jew and the Gentile, the Jew could trace their lineage back to Abraham, show that they were the physical descendants, this gave them that sense of pride as God's special chosen people, but as we now know through the revelation of the new Testament scriptures, all of those things were a picture, a foreshadowing of the true Israel, as Paul wrote, the Israel of faith made up of all those who believe, both Jew and Gentile, both Slave and Free, both Male and Female, poor, and rich, from all walks of life, from every corner of the world.

Have you ever believed in something for a very long time, but after many, many years understood that you were wrong? It can take a long time to sort of fully come away from something that was believed for a long time. For me, it was the understanding of God's work in salvation. Having grown up in the baptist churches in this area from a young age, every Sunday school teacher, bible school I attended, and Wednesday night youth group it was taught to me that I had to make a choice for Christ. And I did, a couple of times..because it never really felt like any of them took. The question would arise, does anyone want to accept Jesus as their savior...well I understood that everyone who didn't would go to hell, and I didn't want to go there so yes, of course I wanted Jesus as my saviour. Then some time would go by, not really giving it second thought, and I was in vacation bible school and that question was asked again...well, ya! Of course I do...I don't want to go to hell, so I went again, repeated a prayer from the teacher and went on my merry way. A few years later, I was laying in bed one night...I was probably around 9 or 10 years old and I had a crushing reality hit me...I was going to die, and I was going to hell, I felt the weight of sin on my heart, I was a mean kid, a bully at school, rebellious, and a troublemaker..God used that to reveal to me the darkness of my little 9 year old heart and I knew...if I died that night, I was going to hell. Out of fear and desperation I cried out to my mom, who shared with me the gospel, and that night I truly believed. But fast forward another 10 years or so, and I hear Pastor Vic Edwards teaching out of Ephesians...that no man comes to the father unless he has been drawn, that it is not of our will or ability.. but of God who chose us.

My world exploded! If I didn't choose God, then my salvation all those years ago must not be true....well, that can't be true, so Vic must be wrong. This reality angered me, either my faith was false, or this teaching was false. Again there was an unsettling in my heart, challenging me in a way I had not been challenged, is my faith real, do I truly believe? Ultimately I had to admit my understanding of God's salvation work was wrong, what I had been taught in the church my entire life, was wrong, because there it was..plain as day in scriptures, we have been chosen by God and without his intervention we would all be lost and destined for hell. I became to understand, that that heavy feeling in my heart all those years ago, the understanding that if I were to die, I was going to hell...was God working in my heart drawing me to him, through the spirit revealing my sin, showing I was unworthy and not a good person, convicting me of my sin and all I could do was cry out for forgiveness.

I think in many ways the Jewish believers had a similar experience. Believing that they are right with God, until God reveals to them.. no they really aren't, being a Jew and a physical descendant of Abraham, doesn't make you right with God, but being in Christ, the promised Messiah is the only way. So I can only imagine the baggage that some may have brought with them, we can already see from Paul's example that there are those who wouldn't lay aside the traditions, even though they had already been fulfilled in Christ. Observing certain days, dietary laws, etc.

So Paul is imploring his readers, and us today to seek unity among believers, we are different people with different stories, who come from various different backgrounds, but our faith in Christ as the one who gave of himself to pay for our sins in a strong uniting bond that should be more important than the usual temporal things that bind people together. And the way he lays out for us to achieve this sort of biblical unity, is through servant hood, being members of one body, we serve one another, and work together for the glory of the Father, with Christ as our example. The main point of these chapters since chapter 14 is the uniting of the Jews and Gentiles together under one banner, united by the blood of Jesus Christ, and for each group to see the other as that self same member of the body of Christ, being willing to lay aside some of those difference understanding that it is Christ and Christ alone at the center of belief, and each having their own measure of faith given to them by God are still yet indeed brothers and sisters born of the same blood.

However, it would be wrong to think that Paul is talking in broad enough terms to accept sinful behavior. In the Corinthian church was a man who took his fathers wife as his own, Paul did not have kind words for him, and in that instance implored the congregation to not accept him, and threatened that he would discipline any others who would act in such a way. So as we can see there is also a limit to this Christian Unity, though we are to pursue it, through servant hood to one another, and as Paul said previously, "as much as depends on you, live in peace with all men." There comes a time when sin is so blatant, so public, that it must be called out with the ultimate goal of restoring that brother or sister who has fallen. The idea of Church discipline, maybe casting out a member for a time is ultimately to seek repentance and forgiveness, and it works to stem the staining effect of sin on a local body of believers. Isolate, and deal with the issue. But such church discipline should likewise never be taken lightly, and the goal is restoration, and upon repentance and a turning away from what ever sin has at that time captured the individual, the church should be willing and able to accept them back in with open arms.

But if the issue continues to reoccur, and the repentance and turning from such a sin seems un-genuine, then it is better for the body to cast off the offending part. This can seem to be a harsh doctrine, but we are not God, and can not truly know the hearts of individuals, but those who are leaders in a local body are called to be shepherds to the people, which is a role that not only includes nurturing and guiding, but also protection..and sometimes such harsh actions may be required for the protection of the congregation. But, this is a last resort type of thing, and only if restoration can not be found. God has given us instruction knowing that we are dealing with a sinful world, and that we are all sinful people, and that there maybe some who make a claim of faith, but do not have the spirit of God working in them. So unity does have its limits, it seems in humanity there is always extremes, and we tend to like to take things all the way to one side or the other, and in this case there can be the temptation to focus so much on unity that we allow and excuse away sinful behavior, and the other extreme is we may rightly confront dangerous sinful behavior but be unwilling to reconcile. IT seems, as with most things in life, the answer lies somewhere carefully balanced in the middle of these two things. We must both aggressively seek unity among our brothers and sisters, and likewise not tolerate open sin, and even the ultimate goal in discipline, and harsh dealing with such sins, is to bring that person, or people back in to the unity again, through repentance and a turning away of what ever sin it may be.

Far too often it seems churches are quick to judge, but slow to forgive. We should be ready to forgive and restore just as Christ has forgiven and restored us. For he is our example, and the standard by which we strive to live by. This gathering, this fellowship should stand both as a beacon of a Christ like love, and truth, and also be a rest haven for the broken, to find rest and be made whole again. We are all a broken people, made complete only by the grace and mercy of God, even Paul, the apostle who wrote a majority of the new testament was not without his past before God appeared to him on that Road to Demascus, calling him out from being a Jewish follower of God, persecuting, imprisoning, torturing, and killing the people of Christ to being the apostle to the gentiles, bringing the gospel to the people who were considered, on the outside. ....Paul described himself, as he chief of sinners...but by the grace and mercy of God has he been forgiven, and God used him mightily for his glory. There is no sin greater than God, there is no sin unforgivable by God, because the reality is, sin is sin, no matter how big, or how small we think it is, it is all a rebellion against God that is why Paul even lists disobedient to parents in his lists describing sinful behavior. Something that not only seems minor and almost out of place in our minds in that list, but is also seems to be the natural disposition of all children.

But the reality is, we are all sinners...we all can place ourselves on that list, Romans chapter 3, Paul reminds us all, "There is none righteous, no, not one." We are all guilty of sin, and while we are in this body, we will continue to struggle and fight with it, but God who is rich in mercy and grace says that he is faithful to forgive, if we only repent and turn from it. And likewise we should also be toward one another, in verse 7 Paul says, "Receive one another just as Christ also received us, and we do so to the glory of God." Forgiveness, reconciliation, seeking unity in Christ is what this Christian walk is all about, and this brings glory to God, for it is a reflection of his own perfect love, forgiveness, and reconciliation toward us. And it is in this light that Paul is instructing both his Jewish and Gentile believing readers to accept one another seeking to heal a common division, through the unifying reality and love of Christ. In the gospel message going out to the Gentile nations, God did not turn his back on Israel, but now he no longer has a special revelation for a special group of people but the call of the gospel goes out to all of humanity, repent and believe. The world seems to try to find unity in its call to just love one another, but it is a call that is ineffectual, for the sinful nature that runs deep in the heart of mankind is incapable of such love. As man seeks to unify, it seems to only bring more and more division because the heart of man is wicked and evil and only seeks its own validation, and selfish desires, without Christ working in the individual through the conviction and works of the holy spirit there can not be any unity that the world seeks.

This concept and idea of Christian unity is a supernatural work of God, bringing people together who would not normally be together, giving a tolerance for one another, our differing personalities, ideas, and oddities, because we are to first and foremost see Christ in one another. Unity can not exist without Christ, and that drive to love one another as we are called could not happen without Christ. Christ is the missing piece in the worlds call for love, Christ is the missing piece for the worlds call to unite together. To find true unity and love, we must preach the gospel to one another, the supernatural love of the one who gave of himself for us, in whom we are bound together in faith to his glory. In Christ we find forgiveness, we find faith, we find love, we find hope, not just for ourselves but for one another. Christ came to redeem his church, to create for himself a nation of people out of this world who will love him, and reflect that love to all those around them, in hopes that others will see Christ through our Christlike conduct, in hopes that others will see Unity where the world struggles with division, where the unloveable come to be loved, and the unaccepted and invited in with open arms.

God is calling out today just as much as ever, for sinners to put aside their rebellion and seek him, the shepherd of the lost, who is going about the world, gathering lost sheep to his flock, by the preaching and teaching of his word, by the ministry of our lives, as we walk in unity and love with one another. Let us all as believers be resigned to seek that which builds up, to seek that which unifies, to seek Christ in one another, knowing and understanding that we are all a broken people who can only be made whole by our Lord and Savior in that final day when we are called up to meet him face to face. But until that day, we are still yet in this flesh, tainted by sin, as we maneuver our way through this world of sin we will stumble, we will fall, we will make mistakes, and yes, we will sin. But we have such a loving and gracious father who is quick to forgive, who casts our sins as far as the east is from the west remembering them no more, we have such a merciful father who is quick to reconcile through that forgiveness, and welcome us again anew each day with open arms. Let us resolve to likewise be like Christ, quick to forgive, not holding grudges, or judgement, but to see Christ in one another, to seek Christ in one another, to edify, to build up, and to rejoice together in this great unity that God has given through the blood of Jesus Christ. And by doing so, we glorify the almighty, it is a form of worship, as we seek to glorify Christ together through Christian love and unity, a small reflection of his own love and forgiveness of us as he brought us into union with God. And I close this morning with Paul's words in verse 13. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### Communion:

As we gather this morning to partake in this communion service, just think upon what Christ has done, he has called his people out of a world of darkness and sin, and has given of himself so that we may be brought to the very throne of God. We are united together by the broken body, and spilled blood of our Lord and Savior, who that night when he was gathered with his close disciples, he established this new covenant in his blood, that all who come to him who are weary, and weighed down by sin, can come to him and find peace, the one who was beaten and broken so we may find forgiveness. That is what we are celebrating this morning as we partake of this meal, the forgiveness that we have through the death of Christ, This is not an empty ritual, nor is it something to enter into lightly, this bread, and this drink, represent the very body and blood of Christ that was shed for you, so that you may enter into the family of God, as his forgiven, loved children. We do this to remember him, because in this flesh we are weak, forgetful, and God has given us this symbol as a reminder of what Christ has done, so as we come together and partake of this meal, let us meditate upon Christ.

Mathew 26:26/ "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you." Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, "Drink from it, all of you, For this is the blood of the new covenant which is shed for you, for the remissions of sins." And as Matthew records, and as is our practice, let us close in a song. .