

**Romans 15:1-13**  
**October 4, 2015**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: How important is unity to you in your family? How about your workplace?

Q: What does it take to achieve unity within your family or your workplace?

Q: When you hear the church talk about “a spirit of unity,” what do you think that means?

[Literally means “to think the same” or 12:16 “live in harmony with one another”]

I think I’ve shared this before, but I have always been inspired by Jesus’s prayer in John 17:23, “I in them and you in me. May they be brought to **complete unity** to let the world know that you sent and have loved them, even as you have loved me. I don’t think Jesus would have prayed this to His Father unless He thought it was achievable. But it raises the same question I just asked you. What does “complete unity” mean? According to the verse I just read, the world would know that God sent Jesus and that God loves His children just as God loves His Son.

Q: So how is that “spirit of unity” supposed to look in the church? Do we have a “spirit of unity” at Riverbend?

**Transition:** What I can tell you is I want to know that we are in unity and that I am a part of contributing to that “spirit of unity.” As Paul begins to wind down his letter, he reinforces the big picture of unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians. He’s going to show us that both Jews and Gentiles were meant to be a part of the kingdom of God. However, we have learned that Jews and Gentiles can be stronger or weaker in the faith, which was creating disunity. Jews and Gentiles had their own ideas as to how their Christian faith could or could not be expressed. Paul wanted them to be ONE in the body of Christ.

Christ is glorified when His children are in unity just as He and the Father and Holy Spirit are one. So let’s read some Scripture to see how every Christian CAN foster a spirit of unity within the body of Christ BY applying Paul’s DIRECTIONS. Invite class to look for DIRECTIONS.

**BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Rom 15:1-13]**

V.1:

- We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

V.2:

- Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

V.3:

- For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”

V.4:

- For everything that was written in the past (what is written in the OT about others who did not please themselves) was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

V.5:

- May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,

V.6:

- so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

V.7:

- Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

V.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

V.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."

V.10:

- Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

V.11:

- And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."

V.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."

V.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.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: We are on mission to find the DIRECTIONS Paul gives us that will help us foster a spirit of unity. Let's start at the beginning. What is the first direction you see?

- Those who are strong (in convictions and conscience) should bear with the failings ("infirmities, weaknesses") of the weak. (v.1)
- The stronger should not be about pleasing themselves. (v.1)

Q: What does Paul mean that we "should not please ourselves?" [Don't be selfish. True Christian love is not selfish; rather, it seeks to share with others and make others happy. It is even willing to carry the younger Christians, to help them along in their spiritual development. We do not endure them. We encourage them! This is what you do as parents. You make sacrifices for your kids to help them grow in their faith.]

- Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. (v.2)

Q: What should our default mindset be? [Be other-centered to build them up.]

Q v.3: What is Paul's basis for telling us that we shouldn't please ourselves? [Of course, the great example in this is our Lord Jesus Christ. He paid a tremendous price in order to minister to us. Paul quoted Psalm 69:9 to prove his point. Does a strong Christian think he is making a great

sacrifice by giving up some food or drink? Then let him measure his sacrifice by the sacrifice of Christ. No sacrifice we could ever make could match Calvary. Jesus came “to do the will” of the Father who sent Him (John 4:34) and to please Him (John 5:30; 8:29)]

- Be a student of God’s Word. It was written to teach us, to give us encouragement and hope. (v.4)

Q: Why was God’s Word provided for us? [To teach us, so that through endurance (“steadfastness in the face of adversities) and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope! This suggests to us that the local church must major in the Word of God and prayer. The first real danger to the unity of the church came because the Apostles were too busy to minister God’s Word and pray (Acts 6:1–7). When they found others to share their burdens, they returned to their proper ministry, and the church experienced harmony and growth.]

Q: How does being a student of God’s Word foster a spirit of unity in the body? [We all need to draw from our source of truth, the Bible. By growing in knowledge, we strengthen our core values together and build community accordingly.]

- Pray that God, who gives endurance and encouragement, will give us a spirit of unity as we follow Christ. (v.5)

Observation: Paul is really beginning a prayer in v.5.

- Seek unity because it allows us to glorify God with “one heart and mouth.” (v.6)

Q: What is the ultimate purpose of achieving “spiritual unity?” [that with **one heart and mouth** (a unity of inward feeling and outward expression) we would **glorify** (pres. tense, “keep on glorifying”) **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ** (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3 have the same wording about God). This is the final purpose of Christians individually and of the church corporately (cf. Rom. 15:7; 1 Cor. 6:20; 2 Thes. 1:12). Statement of the obvious: The opposite is equally true - Disunity and disagreement do not glorify God; they rob Him of glory.]

- Accept one another as Christ has accepted you, which brings praise to God. (v.7)

Q: Isn’t this basic?! The model of acceptance for Christians is the Lord Jesus, who accepted us. Certainly Christians can receive others who differ with them on nonessential matters.]

- Recognize that God intended both Jews and Gentiles to worship together as one, so we need to embrace anyone, regardless of their background. God desires to see us to sing hymns and praises to Him! (v.8-12)

Observation (v.8-12): Paul works hard to demonstrate the validity of Christ’s ministry, particularly the relating to Gentiles, the Apostle Paul quoted four Old Testament passages, introducing the series with the formula, **As it is written** (perf. tense, “it stands written”). Significantly these quotations are taken from all three divisions of the Old Testament—“the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44)—and from three great Jewish heroes:

Moses, David, and Isaiah. The first quotation (Rom. 15:9) is from David's song of deliverance (2 Sam. 22:50; Ps. 18:49); the second (Rom. 15:10), from Moses' valedictory song to the people of Israel (Deut. 32:43); the third (Rom. 15:11), from both the shortest and the middle chapter of the Bible (Ps. 117:1); and the fourth (Rom. 15:12), from Isaiah's messianic prophecy (Isa. 11:10).

There is a beautiful progression in the promises that Paul quoted in Romans 15:9–12:

- The Jews glorify God *among* the Gentiles (Rom. 15:9, quoting Ps. 18:49)
  - The Gentiles rejoice *with* the Jews (Rom. 15:10, quoting Deut. 32:43)
  - All the Jews and Gentiles *together* praise God (Rom. 15:11, quoting Ps. 117:1)
  - Christ shall reign over Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 15:12, quoting Isa. 11:10)
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- Pray that God will fill us with “all joy and peace as we trust in Him” in order to “overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (v.13)

Observation: This is Paul's benediction to his prayer that he started in v.5. Today, Jews and Gentiles in the church are praising God together – which is a beautiful picture of spiritual unity.

**LOOK:**

We have just spent an hour discerning all the directions Paul has given us to move toward a “spirit of unity.” Do you know what your “next step” is to foster a “spirit of unity” among your family of God? I'm trusting that the Spirit is telling each of us what our next step is to glorify Him!

**Close in Prayer**

**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 562–563). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

**Please One Another (Rom. 15:1–7)**

Paul classified himself with the strong saints as he dealt with a basic problem—*selfishness*. True Christian love is not selfish; rather, it seeks to share with others and make others happy. It is even willing to carry the younger Christians, to help them along in their spiritual development. We do not endure them. We encourage them!

Of course, the great example in this is our Lord Jesus Christ. He paid a tremendous price in order to minister to us. Paul quoted Psalm 69:9 to prove his point. Does a strong Christian think he is making a great sacrifice by giving up some food or drink? Then let him measure his sacrifice by the sacrifice of Christ. No sacrifice we could ever make could match Calvary.

A person's spiritual maturity is revealed by his discernment. He is willing to give up his rights that others might be helped. He does this, not as a burden, but as a blessing. Just as loving parents make sacrifices for their children, so the mature believer sacrifices to help younger Christians grow in the faith.

Paul shared the two sources of spiritual power from which we must draw if we are to live to please others: the Word of God (Rom. 15:4) and prayer (Rom. 15:5–6). We must confess that we sometimes get impatient with younger Christians, just as parents become impatient with their children. But the Word of God can give us the “patience and encouragement” that we need. Paul closed this section praying for his readers, that they might experience from God that spiritual unity that He alone can give.

This suggests to us that the local church must major in the Word of God and prayer. The first real danger to the unity of the church came because the Apostles were too busy to minister God's Word and pray (Acts 6:1–7). When they found others to share their burdens, they returned to their proper ministry, and the church experienced harmony and growth.

The result of this is, of course, glory to God (Rom. 15:7). Disunity and disagreement do not glorify God; they rob Him of glory. Abraham's words to Lot are applicable to today: “Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee ... for we be brethren” (Gen. 13:8). The neighbors were watching! Abraham wanted them to see that he and Lot were different from them because they worshiped the true God. In His prayer in John 17, Jesus prayed for the unity of the church to the glory of God (John 17:20–26).

Receive one another; edify one another; and please one another—all to the glory of God.

***Romans 15:8–16:27***

One of the key words in the closing chapters of Romans is “ministry.” In fact, Paul used three different Greek words to discuss the theme. In Romans 15:8, 25, 31; and 16:1, it is the simple word for a servant or service. Our English word “deacon” comes from this word. In Romans 15:16 and 27 (the word “minister”), he used the ordinary word for service in public office or in the temple. In Romans 15:16 he used a word that is found nowhere else in the Greek New Testament; and it means “to perform sacred rites, to minister in a priestly service.”

In this section, Paul explained four different ministries.

## **The Ministry of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:8–13)**

The supreme example of ministry must always be Jesus Christ. “But I am among you as he that serveth” (Luke 22:27). He came first of all to minister to the Jews, that through Israel He might be able to minister to the Gentiles. “To the Jew first” is a principle that was followed in the earthly ministry of Christ and in the early ministry of the church.

For example, John the Baptist came to minister to the nation of Israel to prepare them for their Messiah. When Jesus began His ministry, it was only to the people of Israel. When He sent out the Apostles on their first evangelistic mission, He ordered them, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5–6). This does not mean that He ignored individual Gentiles, because He did minister to a few (Matt. 8:5–13; 15:21–28); but His major emphasis was on Israel.

After His resurrection, He commanded the Apostles to remain in Jerusalem and begin their ministry there (Luke 24:44–49). The period covered by Acts 1–7 is characterized by a ministry only to Jews or Jewish proselytes. It was not until Acts 8 that the Gospel went to the Samaritans; in Acts 10 it went to the Gentiles. Then, through the ministry of Paul, it went throughout the Roman Empire (Acts 13:1–3).

When He came and died, Jesus Christ confirmed the promises that God made to Abraham and the other “fathers” of the Jewish nation (see Luke 1:30–33, 46–55, and 67–80). Some of these promises have already been fulfilled, but many await fulfillment when He returns to earth to establish His kingdom.

Was it selfish of God to emphasize the Jews? No, because through the Jews, He would send the Good News of salvation to the Gentiles. The first Christians were Jewish believers! “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). In the Old Testament period, God chose Israel to be a minister to the Gentiles; but instead, Israel copied the idolatrous ways of the Gentiles and had to be chastened. In the New Testament period, God chose Jewish believers to carry the Good News to the Gentiles, and they obeyed Him.

- There is a beautiful progression in the promises that Paul quoted in Romans 15:9–12.
- The Jews glorify God *among* the Gentiles (Rom. 15:9, quoting Ps. 18:49)
- The Gentiles rejoice *with* the Jews (Rom. 15:10, quoting Deut. 32:43)
- All the Jews and Gentiles *together* praise God (Rom. 15:11, quoting Ps. 117:1)
- Christ shall reign over Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 15:12, quoting Isa. 11:10)

Romans 15:8 covers the period of the Gospels and Acts 1–7. Romans 15:9 describes the ministry of Paul as he witnessed among the Gentiles. Romans 15:10 could be applied to the church council in Acts 15 when the Gentiles were given equal status “with His people.” Today, Jews and Gentiles in the church are praising God together.

The word “trust” at the end of Romans 15:12 is actually the word “hope.” At one time the Gentiles were “without hope” (Eph. 2:12, NIV), but now in Christ they have hope. Not only do believers have hope, but they also have joy and peace and power (Rom. 15:13). The Holy Spirit of God shares these blessings with them as they yield to Him.

Because the Jewish Christians were faithful to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, the nations of the world today have the opportunity to trust Christ as Saviour.

**Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 494–496). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### 3. AS IMITATORS OF CHRIST (15:1–13)

Paul had written that Christians should not despise or condemn others (14:1–12) nor should they hinder the conduct of other Christians (14:13–23). Now he gave a third principle to observe when a believer is dealing with fellow Christians: he is to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was supremely the Person who ministered on behalf of others, not for Himself. It is fitting, therefore, that those who take His name should imitate Him.

15:1–4. Paul summarized the previous discussion (chap. 14) by saying, **We who are strong** (obviously in convictions and conscience) **ought** (pres. tense, emphasizing continuing obligation; its first position in the sentence underscores its importance) **to bear with the failings** (lit., “infirmities, weaknesses”) **of the weak** (lit., “nonstrong”). The strong ought not despise the weak; they ought to bear with them. Also the strong should **not** seek **to please** themselves. This last clause is the key; a Christian should not be self-centered, but should be concerned about the spiritual welfare of others. Pleasing others, however, is not the end in itself, but is **for their good, to build them up** (lit., “unto edification”; cf. “edification” in 14:19). This is the example the Lord Jesus **Christ** left. **Even He did not please Himself**. He came “to do the will” of the Father who sent Him (John 4:34) and to please Him (John 5:30; 8:29). To support this statement Paul quoted a part of a verse from a messianic psalm (Ps. 69:9). Christ was insulted by others because of His associations with God the Father.

Then Paul stated a significant principle concerning the purpose and ministry of the Scriptures: **For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us** (lit., “for our instruction”). **The Scriptures** serve to give believers **endurance** (*hypomonēs*, “steadfastness in the face of adversities”) and **encouragement** so that they **might have hope** (pres. tense, “keep on having hope”; cf. Rom. 5:3–5). As Christians learn from the *past* (what is written in the OT about others who did not please themselves) they are motivated to endure and be comforted in the *present*, looking ahead in hope (confidence) to the *future*.

15:5–6. The steadfast **endurance and encouragement** a Christian receives from the Scriptures (v. 4) come ultimately from **God** (v. 5), the Author of the Scriptures. Paul prayed that God would give his readers **a spirit of unity** (lit., “to think the same”; 12:16, “live in harmony,” has the same Gr. construction) **as they follow Christ Jesus** (lit., “according to Christ Jesus”). The ultimate purpose of this unity was **that with one heart and mouth** (a unity of inward feeling and outward expression) they would **glorify** (pres. tense, “keep on glorifying”) **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ** (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3 have the same wording about God). This is the final purpose of Christians individually and of the church corporately (cf. Rom. 15:7; 1 Cor. 6:20; 2 Thes. 1:12).

15:7. Since the goal of interpersonal relationships among Christians is a unified glorying of God, Paul concluded his commands with **Accept one another** (pres. imper., “keep on accepting or receiving one another”). Significantly this is the same command Paul gave the strong Christians when he opened this entire discussion (14:1). The Model of acceptance for Christians, however, is the Lord Jesus, who **accepted** us. The Lord received believers when they were not only “powerless” (5:6, lit., “weak”) but also “ungodly” (5:6), “sinners” (5:8), and “enemies” (5:10). Certainly Christians can receive others who differ with them on nonessential matters. Jesus **Christ** received them so that they can **bring praise to God** (lit., “unto glory of God”), which is the purpose of Christian unity (15:6).

15:8–12. Having pointed to the Lord Jesus as the Model for Christians, Paul proceeded to discuss Jesus’ ministry and its objectives: **Christ became a servant** (the word “deacon” comes from this Gr. noun *diakonon*) **of the Jews** (lit., “to the circumcision”). Jesus was born a Jew as

God's Messiah for Israel. God had two objectives to accomplish through Jesus' ministry. The first was **to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs** (cf. 9:4–5). God's second objective in Christ's ministry was **so that** (lit., "and that," because the following clause is coordinate with the preceding one) **the Gentiles may glorify God** (cf. 15:6) **for His mercy**. God had made covenants only with Israel (9:4), not with the Gentiles (cf. Eph. 2:12), so God had no covenantal promises to confirm with the Gentiles. Any spiritual blessings that come to the Gentiles spring solely from the mercy of God. Nevertheless God eternally purposed to bless the Gentiles spiritually through the Lord Jesus as their Messiah and through His covenants with Israel (e.g., Gen. 12:3; cf. John 4:22).

God's two purposes in the ministry of Christ are being achieved now while Israel nationally has been set aside (cf. Rom. 11:1–31) and the church is being formed of both Jews and **Gentiles** (Eph. 2:14–22). And it will be achieved in the future when Israel is restored to her place as head of the nations and becomes a means of blessing to everyone (cf. Deut. 30:1–10).

To demonstrate the validity of his statement concerning the ministry of Christ and its purposes, particularly the one relating to Gentiles, the Apostle Paul quoted four Old Testament passages, introducing the series with the formula, **As it is written** (perf. tense, "it stands written"). Significantly these quotations are taken from all three divisions of the Old Testament—"the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44)—and from three great Jewish heroes: Moses, David, and Isaiah. The first quotation (Rom. 15:9) is from David's song of deliverance (2 Sam. 22:50; Ps. 18:49); the second (Rom. 15:10), from Moses' valedictory song to the people of Israel (Deut. 32:43); the third (Rom. 15:11), from both the shortest and the middle chapter of the Bible (Ps. 117:1); and the fourth (Rom. 15:12), from Isaiah's messianic prophecy (Isa. 11:10).

A progression of thought can be traced through the four quotations. In the first, David praised God **among the Gentiles** (Rom. 15:9); in the second, Moses exhorted the Gentiles, **Rejoice ... with His people** (v. 10); in the third the psalmist commanded the Gentiles to **praise the Lord** (v. 11; cf. v. 7); and in the fourth, Isaiah predicted that **the Gentiles** will live under the **rule of the Root of Jesse** (the Messiah) and they **will hope in Him** (v. 12). The Old Testament never presented the Gentiles as "heirs together with Israel, members together ... in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6), but it certainly did see them as receiving blessing from God's fulfilling His covenantal promises to His people Israel.

15:13. Several times Paul's words sound as if he were ending this epistle (vv. 13, 33; 16:20, 25–27). This verse (15:13) is in effect a benedictory prayer. The description of God as **the God of hope** relates to hope mentioned in the preceding verses and to the promises of God recorded in the Scripture which give hope (v. 4). Paul desired God to **fill his readers with all joy and peace** (cf. 14:17). Joy relates to the delight of anticipation in seeing one's hopes fulfilled. Peace results from the assurance that God will fulfill those hopes (cf. 5:1; Phil. 4:7). These are experienced **as believers trust in Him** (cf. Heb. 11:1). As a result believers **overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit** (cf. Rom. 15:19). The achievement of all God's purposes for the spiritual welfare of His children comes from the power given by the Spirit of God. What a fitting closing reminder to the apostle's discussion of Christian living.