

Romans (15:5-7)

Band of Believers

Part 87 – November 5, 2006

UNIFIED DIVERSITY

Q: What makes a God-glorifying church *great*?

Q: If we bring in 1000 shoeboxes, will that make us great? No.

- It isn't the buildings ... though we have a great building!
- It isn't the number of people that attend.
- It isn't the music, or the preaching – whew!

Q: What makes a Christian congregation *great* and *strong*?



I'll give you a hint: it has something to do with unity. But it's not *just* unity; in fact, the most unified congregations are cults! Unity is half of the answer. It is great unity *within* great diversity.

Paul was trying to teach the Jews and the Gentiles of the early church to overlook their deeply entrenched prejudices. Because:

- When we love one another, in spite of our differences.
- When we accept one another, in spite of disagreements.
- When we worship as one, in spite of personal opinions.

This is when a Christ-loving, God-glorifying church becomes great and strong and humble and victorious.

When a white-haired gentleman in a blazer, and a maroon-haired teen with a nose ring worship side-by-side without prejudice, a *powerhouse* of grace and mercy is unleashed!

Everything the world offers segregates. But the church is given the capacity to take a jumbled mix of people and make one body.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. -
Romans 15:5-7

END. AND ENC.

In the previous verse (15:4), we saw that it takes both “endurance” and “encouragement” to produce and renew genuine, joy-filled hope.

... through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. - *Romans 15:4*

Q: Remember heart-attack-man who obeyed his doctor’s advice, and changed his lifestyle, in order to increase his lifespan?



- Hope is the *result of applied encouragement*.

Paul is reminding us that God not only encourages us (by His Word), but even assists our obedience (by His Spirit).

He is: “the God who gives endurance and encouragement” (15:5a)



- His Word is a guide, like an onboard navigation system.
- His Spirit is like the power steering and power brakes.



We have to make choices and decisions, but we’re given a road-map, and our ability to steer and to stop is *enhanced*. He provides the plan and empowers endurance.

HARMONIZING

And He not only wants to give us hope, but harmony as well.

[May God] Give you a spirit of unity among yourselves (15:5b)

Great unity within great diversity is a compelling, appealing, influencing witness of God’s presence and authority.

Think about the musical instruments in an orchestra. They don’t look alike; they don’t sound alike; and they aren’t played alike. But when they’re synchronized and harmonized and following the conductor, they produce a melodic instrumental composition.



So whether you’re an oboe, a bongo, a bagpipe, or a big bassoon: we are a band of brothers ... and sisters. Some of us are wind instruments, and some are brass! But let’s face it, the tuba has nothing in common with the piccolo!



And this is precisely what reveals the presence and authority of God to our community. Because: Harmony couldn't happen without the conductor.

That's why Paul says, "[May God] give you a spirit of unity ..."

As you follow Christ Jesus (15:5c)

Christ must be the conductor. If we're not personally, individually in concert with Him, we have no hope of harmonizing or synchronizing with one another.



The Pharisee and the cultist alike are most happy when everyone is playing the same instrument ... the same way! In their arrogance and/or ignorance they demand "cookie-cutter" uniformity, and thereby demonstrate a failure to appreciate God's purpose for created uniqueness.

- We must insist on unity without sacrificing uniqueness.

HEART & MOUTH

We have grown tremendously in this area as a church; and the evidence is demonstrated both internally and externally.

So that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (15:6)

- The heart symbolizes a unity of purpose.
- The mouth symbolizes a unity of praise.

When we come together it is not to judge or condemn one another, or to argue and quarrel over disputable matters, or to demand our own preferences and opinions.

- We come to offer a symphony of unified worship!

This is why corporate worship has such value. There're certainly times for individual, spontaneous, even impulsive praise. But when we come together here, we willfully submit to our symbolic conductor (be it Ken, Lance, or Andrea) and we stand in *unison*, and clap in *unison*, and sing in *unison*.



- [And] Our synchronization is an expression of unity.

When we are in harmony, God's grace and mercy and love and kindness and beauty and holiness shine in and through us, to those around us. When we are unified, He is glorified.

ACCEPT AS ACCEPTED

Q: Remember the first word of chapter 14?

A: Accept.

Now, after 29 verses, Paul is summing up everything he's been saying, and he returns to the overriding theme of this section:

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you (15:7a)

Jesus is both our motive and our model. So it begs, what I think is an obvious question:

Q: How did Christ accept us?

- If we're going to imitate it, we better understand it!

When it comes to our acceptance, we need to note two things:



1. Jesus sacrificed Himself to make us acceptable.
 2. And now He embraces us in spite of our offense.
- He made us acceptable, and accepts us in our sin

Q: So, how can we offer that kind of acceptance to those Christians who don't look, sound, behave, or believe like me?

First, I can sacrifice something of myself. Unlike Jesus, I have no holiness to offer ... but I can offer my prejudice.

1. I must surrender my sense of superiority and intolerance for those who fall short of my expectations.

And once I have made them "acceptable" in this way, I can embrace them for who they are and where they're at.

2. I must choose to accept and love those "flugelhorns" and "cowbells" in spite of their failures, offenses, and sins.

I accept as I have been accepted, not because they've earned it, or even deserve it. But like Christ, I will do it ...

In order to bring praise to God (15:7b)