

**Not Ashamed
(Week 35)
Romans 15:1-13
“Communion”**

Introduction

Communion: (noun) The sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level. (Websters Dictionary)

Therefore welcome one another, just as Christ also welcomed you to the glory of God.
Romans 15:7

In the **Fifteenth Chapter of Romans**, we are shown exactly how a healthy church, one being led by The Spirit of God, is supposed to operate. The church of Rome was a multifaceted congregation indeed. There were Jewish converts to Christianity, as well as, Gentile Believers that came from every type of paganism imaginable. And what was The Spirit's message to this diverse group? To function as one, to be a single entity wherein each member was more concerned about his neighbor's well being than that of his own. This is agape love. It is a unity of purpose that can only come from The Holy Spirit. And only a “Spirit-filled” church can operate in spiritual oneness. In fact, it was the very thing that Christ prayed for on the night before He surrendered Himself to the cross.

I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in Me through their word. May they all be one, as you, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us, so that the world may believe You sent Me.
John 17:20-21

For you see, it is our “oneness”, this bond of agape that we share, that identifies us as being in Christ Jesus. The world can see it, and it brings glory to God. We are called to be in Christ, and as such, we are also in one another. This is the message of **Romans 15**. Can you just imagine the revival that would occur, if the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world displayed this kind of unity? Sadly, the devil has had a field day in dividing us. The unity that Christ prayed so earnestly for, as he literally sweat drops of blood on the night before His execution, has yet to be fully realized in His Church. Jesus wants us to be “One”.

In **Romans 15**, Paul speaks three times of the Church bringing glory to God (**vs. 6,7,9**). And each time, it is linked to the unity of the believers. Now, if we are being completely honest, every true Christian longs deep within himself to bring glory to God. No true believer wants to bring dishonor upon the Name of our Heavenly Father. So then, how can we glorify God? By being filled with His Spirit, loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbor as ourself. God is pleased with us, when we live to please one another. It is as simple as that.

In our study of *Romans*, we have had a great deal of discussion about being “spiritual” and not “sensual”; to become a living sacrifice and allowing God to use us for His glory. This is how our minds become transformed (**Romans 12:2**). We go from living for ourselves to living for others. It is a process, and it is the responsibility of your church to help guide you along the way. In **Romans Chapter 15**, we see three essential things that the Church must have in order for us to achieve spiritual oneness. They are: Prayer, Teaching, and Love. A careful examination of this text will clearly show us how these things work together within the Body of Christ in order to bring glory to God. Please allow me to explain. To do so, I will attempt to describe each of these three elements in the order that Paul gives them. Biblical instruction (Teaching) and Communion with God (Prayer) will lead to communion with one another (Love).

Teaching (vs. 1-4)

Now we who are strong have an obligation to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not please ourselves. Each one of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please Himself. On the contrary, as it is written, the insults of those who insult You have fallen on Me. For whatever was written in the past was written for OUR INSTRUCTION, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures.

Romans 15:1-4 (emphasis added)

Paul starts out here by saying that we who are strong are not only to tolerate the burdens of the weak, but to take it a step further and to help bear them. So many times, I have seen people discouraged by the treatment that they receive within the church. I believe if we were to count up all of the disenfranchised church members out there that left the church because they felt unloved, the number would be staggering. We cannot bring glory to God, by making the weak feel worthless. It is our responsibility to care for and nurture them in the faith. This means that when we see them struggle, we do everything that we can to lift them up.

Sadly, many in the church today are far more concerned with their own “goings on” than they are about another’s struggles. The mentality of consumerism has infiltrated our congregations in such a way that many people only seem to care about what the church can do for them; how it can meet their own needs. Rarely do you see someone join a church because they feel the need to bear the burdens of others. But this is supposed to be why we are here! Instead of asking the church, “What do you have for me, my kids, etc ?” Why not ask, “Where can I help?”; “What can I do?”; “Who here is in need of me?”. This is supposed to be the heart’s desire for every mature believer in the faith. Of course, we expect the weaker members in the faith to come and have their needs met! But it’s high time that the mature Christian live up to their obligation to bear the weaknesses of others, and not please themselves.

So, just how are believers brought to the place of maturity, so that they go from sensual to spiritual, from selfishness to selflessness? Wait for it... By the TEACHING OF SOUND BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION (went a little crazy with the all-caps there). There are two things that are necessary for babes in Christ to reach maturity, and those two things are Teaching and Prayer. No one will ever mature in the faith without these elements. This is why the teaching of sound Biblical doctrine and close Communion with God are so very important for the health of the Body.

Paul gives us an example to follow when it comes to the use of Scripture to tell us how we should operate. He quotes from *The Old Testament*, **Psalms 69** to be precise. And He uses this old *Psalms* to demonstrate how all of *The Bible* equates with The LORD Jesus. The attitude of Christ is prevalent even in *The Old Testament* Scriptures. And it is an attitude that we are required to emulate (**Philippians 2:5-11**).

Psalms 69 was written by King David, when he was being persecuted by his enemies. David was concerned that he would not respond in the faith that he should. His prayer was that God would guide him, so that he would bear up under his persecution in such a way that would bring glory to God. Sounds like the prayer of a righteous man doesn’t it? One of the things that David prays in this *Psalms* should be on the lips of every mature believer in Jesus Christ:

Do not let those who put their hope in You be disgraced because of me. LORD God of Armies; do not let those who seek You be humiliated because of me. God of Israel. **Psalms 69:6**

Now, that’s a prayer! It teaches us the attitude of a mature believer. David was concerned about becoming a stumbling block for those who were weaker in the faith. He prayed that God’s will be done even in his suffering, so that he would bring glory to God. We also learn by reading this *Psalms*, that it wasn’t simply inspired by The Holy Spirit to tell us of David’s troubles, but rather, it was given to display the humble attitude of Christ Himself! Listen as Paul applies David’s words to the cross of Christ:

...the insults of those who insult You have fallen on Me.

Psalm 69:9

This is precisely what happened on the cross. He took our offenses toward God and placed them upon Himself and bore our burden to Calvary, as it were. And, it is this attitude that teaches us to bear the burdens of one another. Do you see it now? The Scriptures teach us how to be like Christ! And all of those Scriptures, *Old Testament and New*, point directly to Him! To know the Scriptures is to know the mind of Christ. This is why we teach *The Bible* here at this church and not some dime store psychology. We learn the Word of God, so we can become more like The God of The Word!

Prayer (vs. 5-6, 13)

Now may The God who gives endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, according to Christ Jesus, so that you may glorify The God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ with one mind and one voice.

Romans 15:5-6

Now may The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of His Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

Nestled within this short passage of scripture is not one, but two separate prayers. From this, we should understand that in order to have communion with our fellow believers, we must first have close communion with our Heavenly Father. Prayer, when combined with the Teaching of The Word, has the power to transform our minds. It enable us to endure all things, knowing that God is for us.

I will never forget the wisdom of an older gentleman that I met at a worship leaders conference many years ago. I'm certain that by now he has gone on to be with The LORD, but he left a lasting impression, I dare say, on many of the young worship pastors that had gathered for that conference.

Several of us had enrolled in what was called a "break out session" to discuss creativity in the church worship experience. If you've ever been a worship leader, then you will know that there is a lot more to prepare a church worship service that meets the eye. The leaders there in the group were discussing various ways to get the "creative juices flowing", as it were. Everyone was offering suggestions as to how to be more creative when putting together our plans for Sunday worship, when I noticed an older gentleman in the back of the room who had up to this point said nothing. He let everyone else speak, and after the discussion had died down, he said, "Might I make a suggestion?" He was immediately given the floor, and his advice to us all was astonishingly simple. He said, "If you wish to be more creative, might I suggest that you spend more time in communion with God. He is, after all, not called "The Creator" for nothing!" ...Sound advice.

If I may, I would like to amend his statement by saying, if you would like to be less of a stumbling block, if you wish to become more of an encourager to those who are weaker, then spend more time in communion with THE Encourager. I have found that the more that I pray, the more patience that I have with my fellow believers. Perhaps, it is because I am reminded of just how patient The Savior has been with me.

When we study The Word, we realize how far we fall short of living up to it. And when we go before the throne, we should always be honest with God about just who we really are (He already knows by the way). He won't be impressed by excuses or pretense. But, when we get real before Him, then He can start to change us. Listen to this scripture:

Now The LORD is The Spirit, and where The Spirit of The LORD is, there is freedom. We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of The LORD and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory: this is from The LORD Who is The Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Now, I want you to see something in that Scripture. When we study and are taught The Word of God, it reveals to us our many flaws. When we take those flaws to God, with unveiled faces (no pretenses), just being honest with Him, then He goes to work to transform us into the image of Christ. As long as we keep going to God and pretending that we're ok, then nothing will change! But when we get honest about our shortcomings, He corrects our flaws and changes our very nature, until one day when we look into the mirror of His Word, we will see only the likeness of Jesus. We are being transformed from glory to glory (I love that verse)!

Paul then goes on to pray that the God of hope will fill the church at Rome with joy and the peace of The Holy Spirit. He is referring to "The Fruit of The Spirit" (for an exhaustive list see **Galatians 5:22-23**). Communion with Christ will give us all that we need, to have communion with one another. So here is the winning formula for every believer to become as loving and compassionate as Christ: Sound Teaching + Honest Prayer = AGAPE LOVE.

Love (7-12)

Therefore welcome one another, just as Christ also welcomed you, to the glory of God. For I say that Christ became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises to the fathers, and so that Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy. As it is written, therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and I will sing praise to Your Name. Again it says, Rejoice, you Gentiles, with His people! And again, Praise The LORD, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples praise Him! And again Isaiah says, the root of Jesse will appear, the One Who rises to rule the Gentiles; the Gentiles will hope in Him. **Romans 15:7-12**

As far as I am concerned, the key to this entire passage is found in **verse 7**. In **Chapter Fourteen**, Paul tells us to accept the weaker brother, because Christ has accepted them (**14:3**). But here, he commands us to accept one another, because Christ has accepted us! You see, I don't deserve the Grace I have received in Christ, and frankly, neither do you. So therefore, when we think of how Christ accepted us, how can we not accept one another?

Paul returns once more to the Jew/Gentile dynamic in these verses. No doubt, to remind the Jewish converts in Rome that their Gentile counterparts were not there by accident. We also should consider the diversity within the Roman Church, for in spite of their differences, they were commanded to live together as one body. The same is true for us as well. A child of God can be of any race, social standing, or background. And as such, we are made one in The Body of Christ.

There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. **Galatians 3:28**

There can be no such thing as a prejudiced follower of Christ. We have been called to become one in Christ and to love our neighbor as ourselves. And to be honest, it is only by the power of The Spirit that we can overcome the many differences that divide us. Only by The Spirit of God can there be unity.

Paul quotes from *The Old Testament* to make his point that God had always intended for salvation to be for all, no matter their ethnicity. He uses passages from *Deuteronomy*, *2 Samuel*, *Psalms*, and *Isaiah*, to emphasize his point that God has chosen to call Jew and Gentile alike into the same body and have this wondrous unity give Him glory. So, if you want to glorify God, accept those whom He has accepted, always remembering that He has accepted you! Bear one another's burdens. Don't live to please yourself, but rather, live to please others, and you will bring glory to God! Prayer + Teaching = Love. You are most like Christ, when you love those whom Christ loves. Let us always strive to have communion with Him and with one another.

And let all of God's chosen and accepted say... TRUTH!!!