

**Not Ashamed
(Week 37)
Romans 15:20-33
“Koinonia”**

Introduction

Koinonia (Greek) - communion or fellowship, joint participation, the share which one has in anything. A gift jointly contributed, a collection. It identifies the idealized state of fellowship and unity that should exist within the Christian Church, the Body of Christ.

Right now I am traveling to Jerusalem to serve the saints, because Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.
Romans 15:25-26

There are some wonderful Christian principals that are clearly demonstrated in Paul's closing of his letter to the church at Rome. The wonderful thing about Paul, that should be able to be said of any pastor, is that he practiced what he preached. There isn't the slightest bit of hypocrisy in this faithful apostle. He took his calling seriously, and as such, he was able to say things like:

Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:1

You see, Paul didn't mind having others watch his life to see if it measured up to his message. He was fully consumed with serving Christ. And it showed, in every aspect of his being. It must have been both encouraging, and a little convicting, for those at Rome to see the example set forth in Paul's writing. I know it has that effect on me. Paul was the real deal. His was a life lived in the service of those for whom Christ died. Everything else that he did was done only in support of this mission of grace to the Gentiles. For Paul, **to live was Christ (Philippians 1:21).**

As his letter comes to a close, he reiterates his desire to come to Rome and be a blessing to the church there, as well as, receive a blessing from them. But his desire for their fellowship would not outweigh his commitment to finish every task that had been assigned to him by The Spirit. Paul was a task-driven individual, and as such, he would see an assignment accomplished, before he moved on to the next. His missionary journeys had kept him away from Rome, but he only had one more task to fulfill, then it would be on to Spain (or so he hoped), which should have given him a path straight though Rome. He was excited about the prospect. He just had one more place to go first, and that was Jerusalem.

The only problem was... he wasn't very popular there. The Jews, who had rejected Paul's message of the gospel, wanted him dead. And the church in Jerusalem, which was comprised primarily of Jewish converts to Christianity, weren't all too thrilled that Paul was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Many of them felt that in order for the Gentiles to be saved, they must first convert to Judaism, and THEN accept Christ. In fact, there were many who followed Paul around wherever he planted churches, and came in after he had left to try to convince the Gentile Christians that Paul had not been straight with them. They told them that God would not be pleased with them, if they did not observe all the Jewish Laws including circumcision and the observance of ceremonial feast days. Not to mention all of *The Old Testament* dietary restrictions. It was as if these men were bent on undoing everything that Paul did (see the book of *Galatians*). So, needless to say, returning to Jerusalem was not just a blessed homecoming for Paul. It was to place himself in grave danger. But he was compelled by The Spirit to go there nonetheless.

There are truths that we find in this passage that I believe are vital for every Christian to understand. In these few verses, we see an example of the true fellowship that believers are to have with one another. In the Greek, the word for this fellowship is called *Koinonia*. It is the intimate sharing of all that we are with each other. Koinonia is the bond of Solidarity, Sharing, and Supplication, that every church should maintain between its members. It is the oneness that Christ prayed for us to have the night before He went to the cross (**John 17:20-26**). It is agape being lived out for all to see. Let us examine together this “Koinonia Fellowship”, for which we should strive, within The body of Christ.

Solidarity (vs. 20-24a)

My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, Those who were not told about Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand. That is why I have been prevented from coming to you. But now I no longer have work to do in these regions, and I have strongly desired for many years to come to you whenever I travel to Spain... **Romans 15:20-24a**

Paul's calling to establish churches far and wide had indeed been a daunting task. But he was to the point of being able to say that he had gone to every region where God had sent him. This by no means is saying that Paul had converted completely those regions to Christ, but he had gone there and shared the message of Christ and planted churches in order to continue the work.

Paul was a church planter, and he longed to take the gospel to every corner where it had not been shared. He wasn't interested in going in after someone else that had already established a work. He knew all too well what that felt like. Those "Judaizers" (as they were often called) made it their life's ambition to follow Paul around and attempt to discredit him. He wasn't about to do that to a fellow believer. Paul was about unity, not division. He wanted to reach as many lost souls as he could. He had no interest in making other preachers look bad. We would do well in the church to remember that, if we are preaching Christ and Him crucified, then we are on the same team, even if we do not agree on all the minor details! Paul worked for solidarity between the churches.

It is for this reason that he longed to visit the church in Rome. Not to undo what someone else had begun, but rather, to have fellowship with a sister church. Back when I was young in the ministry, I was a choir director in a Methodist church. I remember one Christmas, I invited a small Baptist church up the street to join with us for a Christmas concert. Two Choirs of two different denominations, coming together to sing and celebrate the birth of our Savior.

I had a few that tried to discourage me from doing such a thing. After all, Methodist and Baptist have some differences of opinion you know! But guess what? We were able to overcome those petty doctrinal disputes (such as sprinkling verses immersion). In fact, in all the time we were together, our differences never even came up. Not even once! Would you like to know what happened? It was wonderful! I think it still ranks as one of my favorite church services ever. You should have seen those two churches singing together!

Solidarity. That's the living proof of agape. It's kind of like the wind. You can't see it, but you can tell where it has been, and you can see what it's doing. Agape love is invisible, but when you see the solidarity that it produces among the faithful, you can sure tell that it's been there!

Paul didn't want to go to Rome to tear anything down. He wanted to go there to be a part of it! I'll bet I've heard this statement a thousand times in the ministry: "I can worship God anywhere. I can go to the lake or the mountains and worship God, just as good as I can in a church." True! You can absolutely worship God at any place and at any time. But if you don't enjoy the fellowship of other believers, then don't kid yourself, you do not have the love of Christ within you. No one who is in Christ will have to be forced to go to church. They LONG for it!

Paul wanted to be in the company of fellow Christians. He wanted to belong to the universal church of Jesus Christ. He longed to have fellowship, intimate Koinonia Fellowship, with every believer that he could. With Koinonia, there is no room for jealousy or enmity of any kind. Only a burning desire to be one.

Sharing (vs. 24b-29)

...For I hope to see you when I pass through and to be assisted by you for my journey there, once I have first enjoyed your company for a while. Right now I am traveling to Jerusalem to serve the saints, because Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes

they were pleased, and indeed are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to them in material needs. So when I have finished this and safely delivered the funds to them, I will visit you on the way to Spain. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. **Romans 15:24b-29**

There are two mentions of giving in these verses. First, Paul was asking the established Roman church to assist him financially so that he could plant a new church in Spain. This is the kind of giving that we are used to; mature believers, giving of themselves financially to reach others for Christ. We do it all the time in our churches today. We take up collections for foreign missions around the globe. Sending money to people we have never met, in order to spread the gospel of Christ. We give, so that others can go and make disciples. Nothing new to see here.

But look at the second mention of giving. Paul had taken up a collection from his newly planted Gentile churches to send back to the established church in Jerusalem! That is not something that we normally see. Immature believers being asked to give to the mature ones. But there is a lesson for us all here. If we have koinonia, then we will share with those in need. It doesn't matter if you just accepted Christ or you have walked with Him for decades, Christians are called to share with one another!

You see, the church in Jerusalem was being persecuted. Many of those who had converted to Christianity from Judaism had subsequently lost their jobs as a consequence. The church in Jerusalem was hurting. And Paul was of the opinion that since salvation had come to the Gentiles by way of faithful Jewish believers, then the Gentiles were more than obligated to offer them financial assistance in their time of need.

Not only was this the right thing to do, Paul had also hoped that by having the Gentiles send this gift, that it would bridge the gap between those skeptical Jews and the Gentiles that they had so disdained in the past. Kind of hard to have a person bail you out and still have hard feelings toward them isn't it? So you see, Paul was using this as a means to further bring solidarity between the two groups. Who knows, maybe one day they would be able to merge their Choirs for a Christmas program?! Paul was certainly doing his part to bring these congregations into fellowship.

The Greek word that Paul uses here for "contribution" is actually, you guessed it... "Koinonia". It is the kind of solidarity that shares with those in need. I'll just be honest here. I don't want to be a part of any church that doesn't take care of one another. To be in Christ is to be unable to turn a blind eye to the sufferings of others. If we see a need in the Church, not just our little congregation, but in The CHURCH worldwide, we must do what we can to meet that need. That is koinonia.

If you read the book of *Acts*, you will see example after example of those within the church selling their possessions in order to meet the needs of others. They would sell their land and bring the money and lay it at the apostles feet to be distributed as they saw fit. They didn't give in order to be praised or applauded, they gave because they loved each other.

One of the scarier stories in *The New Testament* is the story of Ananias and Sapphira (***Acts 5***). They saw all the other folks bringing in their money to give to those in need and saw it as an opportunity to do so for political gain. They wanted folks to look up to them, but not enough to be sacrificial about it. They sold a piece of land that was theirs to sell. So far so good. They kept back some of the money. Still their prerogative. But then they lied to the church and said they were giving all of the proceeds to help the poor. Big mistake. God struck them down. Not because they didn't give all the money, but because they lied in order to make themselves look good. If you want to help someone, do it out of love, and not grudgingly, or so that people will notice you. Sharing, is part of being united as one in the Body of Christ! If He be in you, then koinonia sharing just happens naturally.

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven. So whenever you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what

your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father Who sees in secret will reward you. **Matthew 6:1-4**

Take my advice; if you see someone in the Church that has a need, then that is God's personal invitation for you to help them with it. You don't have to go off and pray about it. Koinonia insists that you share what you have. Now, I'm not one of those "name it and claim it" televangelists. In fact, I am pretty much the exact opposite. But I am here to tell you this truth, you CANNOT out-give God. And when you share what you have with others, He will bless you much more than you blessed them. You can trust me on that, I know it first hand. Agape love will produce koinonia sharing. And sharing with those who have needs isn't just a good idea, it's a way of life for the true Believer in Jesus Christ. He died for us, not to mention, it is He Who has blessed us with all that we have. The least we can do is share with our brothers and sisters. So share, do it often and with a cheerful heart.

The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. Each person should do as he has decided in his heart — not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a CHEERFUL giver. **2 Corinthians 9:6-7** (emphasis added)

Supplication (vs. 30-33)

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, through our LORD Jesus Christ and through the love of The Spirit, to strive with me in prayers to God on my behalf. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, and that, by God's will, I may come to you with joy and be refreshed together with you. May The God of peace be with all of you. Amen. **Romans 15:30-33**

Paul realized that going back to Jerusalem meant trouble for him. We read in the book of Acts that the Jewish leaders there wanted not only his preaching silenced, they wanted Paul dead. And, as if that weren't bad enough, Paul wasn't exactly sure that he would be well received by the Jewish Believers either. Many of them were not overly fond of his endeavors to reach the Gentiles. But Paul was willing to risk everything to see unity come to the Body of Christ. He desperately wanted both lost Jews and Gentiles to come to faith, and he wanted believing Jews to embrace their Gentile brethren. He hoped that the offering he brought would help him accomplish these goals of Koinonia in the family of God.

Paul pleaded with the Romans to pray for him. To pray for his safety, and his mission, so that he could then be on his way to Rome, and eventually to Spain to preach there. As we have talked at length in this series, prayer is a powerful weapon that every believer has at their disposal. When we can do nothing else but pray, we have still given the best that we have to offer. As believers, we are responsible for one another. When Cain killed his brother Abel, and God asked about him, Cain replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer to that question, if you are a true follower of Christ, is, "Yes, you most certainly are." We have been set apart for Sharing, Solidarity, and Supplication, always praying for the saints.

Do you realize that in a moment of prayer you can join forces with missionaries all around the world? Well you can! So pray, pray for the believers in the body that you know, and for the ones that you do not. Paul had very few acquaintances in Rome, but he lifted them up in prayer nonetheless. In fact, after asking them to pray for him, he prayed for them for the third time in this short passage! That is koinonia, my friends. And that is exactly what every church needs to be all that Christ has prayed for us to be. **So pray! Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).** **And while you're at it, pray for your pastor, because he is praying for you!**

Let those longing for koinonia say... TRUTH!!!