

077 – Why Do I Need to Get Along with You?

Romans 15:5-13

Message by Dr R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 8/6/2017

Review

For the **last 27 verses** Paul has been talking about getting along with one another. And still not quite done. In total he devotes **35 verses (14:1 – 15:13)** to the subject of how we are to accept and encourage and support others who don't necessarily think or behave the way we think they ought to.

He's given us the "**what**":

"Accept one another."

"Stop passing judgment on one another."

"Don't offend one another."

"Make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification."

"Don't cause your brother to stumble and fall."

"Bear with one another's failings."

"Please your neighbor."

"Build up one another."

Now in the verses we're going to look at today, he gives us the **why**.

In every area of life it's important to know why you're doing something. To have a goal, a purpose. Whether it's going to school for further your education, or deciding on a career, or saving to purchase a car or house, or anything else – to give meaning to the activity you have to be able to answer "Why am I doing this? What will be end result be?"

Romans 15:5,6 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is actually a prayer of Paul. Reminds me of what we refer to as Jesus' high priestly prayer in **John 17**. As he prays for the disciples he is about to leave behind, he prays at great length for their unity. And not just those immediate disciples, but for future generations of disciples as well (includes us).

John 17:20 *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."*

The word "unity" is used to mean many things. It's helpful to first look at what he is **NOT talking about**.

1. **Organizational unity.** Recall the ecumenical movement thirty to forty years ago, which attempted to get churches of various denominations to merge together. A few Protestant denominations joined together in what is now known as the Church of Christ Uniting, and in some places there was a movement to bring the Protestant churches into Church of Rome. Lost momentum, not much traction today.

Obviously need some organizational structure to do such things as planting churches, sending missionaries, building schools and hospitals. That's why like-minded churches with common goals join together to form associations or denominations or fellowships. We are part of an association of churches called the Evangelical Free Church of America – an association of over 1500 churches in the USA and 770 missionaries and partners in 46 countries. Voluntarily coming together with a shared Statement of Faith and purpose *to multiply transformational churches among all people*.

But that is not what Paul is referring to in the text today.

2. **Conformity** – Striving for an identical pattern of looks and behavior – how to speak, how to dress, what you can eat and drink, where you can and can't go. Anyone who deviates from the established pattern is suspect, and gets a label: "worldly," or "backslidden," or even apostate.

Jesus came to break such rigid group-think. We can be overly influenced by one another. An entire congregation can be in total agreement about something and still be totally wrong!

We've already covered that from our study in the last couple of chapters in Romans, and so can conclude that is NOT what Paul is talking about.

So what kind of unity does Paul have in mind? Sometimes it is helpful to see how Paul uses the word in other places

Paul writes about two types of unity in **Ephesians 4**. In verse **3** he talks about the **unity of the Spirit**. In verse **13** he refers to **unity in the faith**.

Unity in the faith is a unity of understanding or doctrine. Paul refers to it as something yet to be attained. Since none of us have perfect a understanding of the Bible all the Bible teaches, as much as we would like to all be in doctrinal agreement, our views differ on some matters. As much as we work towards a common understanding, differences are inevitable given our present finite understanding of God's truth.

Unity in the Spirit is different. It's not something we are working towards, but something we already have. It has been given to all believers, and it is our responsibility to maintain it. We are one in the Spirit not based on our limited and even mistaken understanding of God's truth, but by virtue of the justifying faith which makes all of us one in the body of Christ. **Ephesians 4:4,5** *There is one body and one Spirit . . . one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all.*

As Christians we are called to appreciate and support one another, despite our differences. We all belong to the same family, we are part of the same body.

Back to our text, Paul links his prayer for unity to the fact that it is made possible by God's gifts of "endurance" and "encouragement."

Romans 15:5 *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves.*

Endurance and encouragement are attitudes. The word "**spirit**" is in small letters, and so we can deduce that the unity he is talking about is one of also one of **attitude**.

When Jesus prayed for their unity he prayed for a unity that reflected that of the Father and Son of God. The unity of the Godhead is a oneness of values, aspirations, goals, wills and purpose.

We come to the purpose clause of the text.

Romans 12:6 *so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

God is made known as the great and wonderful God as Christians praise him, proclaiming the gospel with one heart (inner attitude) and one mouth (outward expression).

Here we have an answer to the idea that each person has a right to his own personal views and can act however he pleases. Where oneness of heart and mouth is lost, somebody is wrong, someone is not glorifying God but himself (or herself). Someone is forsaking the Word, injuring the church, putting in jeopardy the unity of the Spirit, diminishing God's reputation, darkening the glory of God. It is imperative that we get along with one another because, when we don't, God is dishonored.

The reason we all need to get along with one another isn't so much that the church might be a pleasant place, or so that weak Christians might be encouraged, or that it will lower my stress levels, or so we can feel good about ourselves, but that God might be glorified!¹

When we work in harmony of mind and spirit with one another, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is glorified. And isn't that the ultimate purpose and goal?

How many of you who were in catechism classes as children? Do you remember the first question? "*What is the chief end of man?*" Answer: "*the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.*"²

To glorify God is speak and act in such a way that God's magnificent attributes are made evident in such a way that people will honor and praise him, that they can't help but burst out with expressions of awe and wonder and praise.

On Friday Connie and I were watching a Louie Giglio talk on **Psalm 148** about how all creation praises God. **4 Praise him,**

¹ John Piper, sermon preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, on Romans 15:1-9, n.d. "*God made us human for his glory. And we are fully human only when we live for his glory. Human community, human togetherness, human bonding, human society was ordained by God for his glory.*"

² From the Shorter Westminster Confession of Faith, used by Presbyterians and modeled after the Heidelberg Confession used by many continental Reformed Churches.

***all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens. Vs. 7
Praise the LORD . . . you great sea creatures.***

Took recordings of the sounds waves of distant pulsar stars, which emit audible sound frequencies. Some sound like drumbeats, another like the string section of an orchestra, varying in pitch. He mixed with it recordings of what the Hawaiians refer to as whale songs. And then overlaid it with Chris Tomlin singing “God of wonders.”

God of wonders, beyond our galaxy

You are holy, holy

The universe declares Your majesty

You are holy, holy

Lord of Heaven and Earth (Lord of Heaven and Earth)

Lord of Heaven and Earth (Lord of Heaven and Earth).

Verse 7 sums it up pretty well. **Romans 15:7 *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.***

If we place restraints on our acceptance of believers, we are violating the example of our Master, whose redemptive action (and the people’s faith response) determines who is in the circle of fellowship.

Accepting one another is more than meeting under the same roof. The verb literally means to take to oneself, to open up your heart to someone and welcome them and receive them.

This acceptance of another should happen in spite of ethnic and cultural differences, in spite of non-essential differences we may have – such as disagreements over days and food and drink.

You don’t just agree to disagree, but then never talk to each other. You accept one another into your heart, you welcome them into your very life.

Our vision at Grace Church is to attract people to Christ with love, grace and excellence – because he is excellent! His worth is beyond compare, inexpressibly huge and overarching. His majesty is beyond compare, his glory and holiness indescribable.

And most amazing of all, this person – the very Son of God – has **accepted you**. Jesus’ all-embracing acceptance of people of all sorts is astonishing! We read in the gospels that **he accepted:**

Sinners

Luke 5:27-32. Tells the story of Jesus’ calling one of his twelve inner circle. His name was Levi (Matthew), who was a tax collector.

When he became a Christ-follower, he threw a huge party, so he could introduce his old friends and former associates to Jesus. Spares no expense. Luke calls it a “*great banquet.*”

His colleagues weren’t well thought of by the Jewish leaders.

Luke 5:30 *But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”*³

The Pharisees wrote the book on “holier-than-thou-ism.” They were concerned with the purity of their religion and the practical application of the law in every conceivable situation.

Their very name means “separated ones.” Thought that to remain pure, had to avoid contact with common people, anyone whose cultural identity or political views differed from theirs.

And so they took great pains to avoid tax collectors – not just to dodge paying the government, but because they were considered unclean.

They were unclean politically, employed by the hated occupation forces of Rome.

They were unclean ceremonially – in daily contact with Gentiles. They were excommunicated from the local synagogue and barred from temple worship.

What is Jesus doing eating with them? Eating and drinking was not just putting food or drink in your mouth. Bonding happened and relationships were built around the table. Eating with someone meant you accepted them.

³ In **Luke 15** we again read about the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttering about Jesus, “***This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.***” Jesus responds by telling three parables: the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost Son. All of them illustrated the Son of God’s passion to seek and save the lost

For 2,000 years we've gotten used to the concept that Jesus' ministry was directed toward sinners. But at the time this actually happened, it was shocking. The respectable people were greatly offended that a religious teacher would care so little about appearances that he would blatantly seek out and even eat with sinners.

When we call Jesus a "friend of sinners" it is a heart-warming affirmation. When they said it, it was a stinging criticism.

Luke 5:31 *Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

The Pharisees missed why Jesus was hanging out with Jesus. It is possible to hang out with people not because you approve or acquiesce to their behavior or views, but because you're a change agent to influence them.

Teachers don't hang out with children because they prefer ignorance, but to show them a world beyond their limited knowledge and experience.

Social workers don't spend their days with dysfunctional people because they prefer problem people, but to help them lead normal lives.

Doctors don't spend time with the sick because they like disease and trauma, but in order to heal the sick.

Jesus mixes with tax collectors and sinners not because he condones their sin, but in order to heal them and save them from the tyranny of sin and sickness.

Just like you don't go to the doctor if you're well, but only if you're sick and admit you need his help, so Jesus' message doesn't have any relevance to those who don't think they need him, who see no need for repentance or forgiveness.

Another favorite story is of the woman who had been caught in adultery, recorded in **John 8**. The religious leaders used her to try and trap and discredit Jesus.

They publicly bring the frightened, humiliated woman to Jesus as he was teaching in the temple courts, and demanded **John 8:4,5** *"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of*

adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

They think they have caught him. If Jesus says, "forgive her" he will lose his credibility. They will denounce him for rejecting God's law and therefore not an authentic messenger of God.

If, on the other hand he says, "I agree! Stone her!" Jesus will lose his reputation for compassion among the people. They will condemn him for being harsh and insensitive, alienating a considerable percentage of the population, who thought the penalty was too severe (adultery was fairly prevalent during the first century, but executions were uncommon).

The Jews weren't allowed to execute anyone without the permission of the Roman authorities, and the Romans did not consider adultery a capital offense. They could report Jesus to the Roman authorities as circumventing their rules and inciting the people to independent exercise of the death penalty.

We know what Jesus did. First, he caused each of the accusers to be convicted by his own sins. One by one they slunk away. Then when the people who could have condemned and killed her were gone, he said: **John 8:11** *Neither do I condemn you. . . Go now and leave your life of sin."*

He didn't excuse her actions, in fact he told her to change her behavior. But rather than rejecting her, he accepted her as one of the many sinners for whom he was very soon to die.

Outcasts

Even more abhorrent to Pharisees than tax collectors were lepers. Social outcasts, they were banned from normal human contact, required to stay outside the gates of the city so they wouldn't contaminate others with their disease.

Jesus accepted even these, and in an amazing display of grace reached out and actually touched them when he healed them.

In **Luke 5** a poor leper came and begged him, **Luke 5:12** *"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."*

We read **Luke 5:13** *Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him."*

Unclean

Tax collectors and lepers weren't the only ones classified as ceremonially "**unclean**," who couldn't go to the temple, or participate in certain other activities. Any kind of bodily discharge, including bleeding, made people unclean. Other people couldn't touch even their clothing or sit where they had been sitting without becoming unclean themselves.

Mark records the story of an unclean woman, who had been bleeding for twelve years, who touched Jesus. For twelve years she had lived a life of painful isolation and loneliness. But when she learned that Jesus was coming, she followed after him and dared to reach out and touch the fringe of his garment, thinking **Mark 5:28** "*If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.*"

When she did so her bleeding immediately ceased. She was healed! Yet I'm sure she was terrified when Jesus suddenly stopped, turned around in the crowd, and asked **Mark 5:30** "*Who touched my clothes?*"

Frightened, she came forward, expecting a rebuke for having touched and contaminated the great teacher. But instead of rebuking her for doing something wrong, he commended her. **Mark 5:34** "*Daughter, he said to her, "Your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."*

A few verses later we read that Jesus went to the home of a synagogue ruler whose daughter was dead. Coming into contact with a dead body defiled a "clean" person for about a week. Yet Jesus did not hesitate to touch the dead girl and bring her back to life, anymore than he failed to touch the lepers or the woman who was bleeding.

These are just a few illustrations of the fact that Jesus accepted even the most unclean, extending salvation and healing in doing so.

Us

Just as wonderful as Jesus' acceptance of the sinful, outcast, unclean of his day is his acceptance of you and me.

We may not be despised as were the tax collectors or outcasts in the sense the lepers were, but we are each one of us sinners in thought, word and deed. We turn our backs on God and trample his mercy underfoot. Our transgressions have made

us filthy from head to toe. Compared to the standard of God's holiness, even **Isaiah 64:6** *all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*

Apart from Christ we are utterly abhorrent to a holy God, and a menace to one another. But in spite of that fact, the Lord Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, accepted you and died for you. And God the Father has accepted you too.

How, then, can you possibly exclude others? Their lives may be a mess. They may be despised or shunned.

But I can't find any exception clauses. "*Accept one another unless_____ , or accept one another except_____.*

Romans 15:7 *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*

As you have been accepted, you must accept others. You must love not just those like you, but those who differ from you, and seek to bring to Christ those who are lost and not yet Christians – for his sake and for his glory.

How does Jesus accept you? Does Jesus accept you on the basis of your opinions?

Does he accept you because he approves of your practices, and loves everything you do?

Does he accept you because of your curiosity, your inquisitiveness?

Does he accept you because you have no idiosyncrasies or quirks of personality?

No. He accepts you solely on the grounds of the cross of Calvary, where the perfect Son of God took your sins upon himself. He paid the penalty that you might be set free forever!

You come to him equipped with nothing more than your own confession, your own admission of sin and need of a Savior, and you accept his great and wonderful and never ending grace.

A very important thing you must realize is this: Jesus' acceptance of you is **not** unconditional. We talk about the unconditional **love** of Christ, as well we should. ***For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.*** His love is unconditional. But his acceptance is not. His acceptance is conditioned upon repentance and your faith, your trust in Him.

That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Likewise our acceptance of people is not unconditional. Just because someone is a good citizen, pays their bills and taxes or keeps their yard looking neat, or can make other people laugh doesn't mean they are believers. Paul isn't advocating that we be blindly tolerant of everyone. We ask questions. We're careful.

But we do accept those whom Christ accepts. If they have in faith called God their Father and Jesus their Savior, then how can we not welcome them, receive them, call them "brother" or "sister?"

Independent of what our heritage may be or what the sign may say out in front of where we meet or what your opinion may be on certain disputable matters, if you call Christ "Savior" and God "Father" you and I are in the same family. We have the same "family tree" – the CROSS of Jesus Christ.