

## 078 What Difference in the World Does Our Getting Along with Each Other Make?

**Romans 15:7-12**

Message by Dr R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 8/13/17

When Christianity burst into existence after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the world was an extremely divided place.

Some of the divisions were nationalistic. The Greeks hated the Romans who had overpowered them and now dominated the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. The Romans looked down on nearly all the conquered and therefore “inferior” people of the then-known world.

### **Full screen map of Mediterrean world at the time**

There were rivalries between cities, resolved only when one city destroyed the other, like Sparta did to Athens, or Rome did to Carthage.

Some divisions were racial, like those between Greeks and Romans and Arabs and Jews.

Many of those divisions reached back over centuries of hatred, and some still persist today, fueling tensions in the Middle East.

Some of the divisions were religious. The sharpest of these was the division between the strict monotheism of the Jews, and the Gentile religions with their many pagan gods.

The Jews looked down on Gentiles as heathens. The Greeks considered anyone who didn't know their language as barbarians.

It's hard to imagine how deep those divisions were at the time of Christ's coming, although we can get an idea when we take an honest look at the hatreds of our own time towards those who differ from one another over race or culture or politics or religion.

But, as real as those divisions were, the remarkable thing is that they did not divide the Christians. Christians transcended them, so that the church from the very beginning was comprised of Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Romans, slaves and free, blacks and whites, rich and poor.

Paul's sending church in Antioch is a superb example.<sup>1</sup> Its leaders included Barnabas, a Jew from Cyprus; Simeon, a black man; Lucius, who was probably Roman, Manean, an aristocrat who had been raised with Herod, and Saul, the Jewish teacher from Tarsus. Their cohesiveness despite their diversity resulted in their being a powerful and effective gospel proclaiming church.

How could people this diverse join together and function so fruitfully? They knew Jesus, the very Son of God. They knew he had accepted them, sinners as they were, and therefore they accepted all others for whom he had also died.

We read last week Paul's admonition to the Romans, and by extension to us today. The “orders” haven't changed.

**Romans 15:7 *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.***<sup>2</sup>

Never forget that the ultimate goal and purpose underlying everything we do should be to bring glory and praise to God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

We all acknowledge this deep down, but we need to bring it to the front of our minds and be intentional about giving God glory in everything we do.

And Paul doesn't mean “*get along with one another, and someone might just see God's glory in that, whether or not that's your goal.*”

We weren't created and put into relationships to unconsciously or inadvertently give God the glory – like the mountains and the birds and the seas and the stars and the great sea creatures do. They make God look amazing without knowing that's what they are doing.

Paul is talking about intentional, joyful, authentic **vocal** proclamation and acclamation that God is great and glorious.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 13:1

<sup>2</sup> When we accept one another for the glory of God, we are hoping and praying that our welcoming will not only deepen our friendships with one another, but that it will awaken in them and in us more love and adoration of our awesome God.

As **verse 6** pointed out, giving God glory involves opening our mouths and using our voices. **Romans 15:6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

We have sung praises to the Lord this morning, now let us say some praises to the Lord. Repeat after me: **Praise the Lord! God is great! God is worthy! God is good (all the time); All the time (God is good).**

In the passage we'll be looking at today, **Romans chapter 15 verses 8-12**, Paul continues talking about why we need to get along. First and primarily it is so God is glorified when we do so. Second, and flowing from that, is the horizontal element – that the world might believe in him through our testimony and join us in praising him.

Did you ever stop to think that how we treat one another has global implications, that our unity or lack thereof either helps or hinders the church in its witness to the world?

We accept one another so the Lord will be praised – not just in our midst, not just in our town, not just in our state, not just in our country, but around the world!

Our acceptance of one another has a ripple effect! It resonates around the world!

Let's open up our text and unpack that concept.

**Romans 15:8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews<sup>3</sup> on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs**

Two things jump out in **verse 8**: 1. Jesus came as a Jew to serve the Jewish people; and 2. he confirmed the promises of God.

This simple brief statement epitomizes the earthly ministry of Jesus, who announced that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel<sup>4</sup> and restricted his disciples' activities at that time (before his death and resurrection) to their own nation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Literally **of the circumcision**. Obviously a reference to natural Israel, for circumcision was the sign and zeal of the covenant with Abraham.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 15:24

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 10:5,6

This dedicated limitation of ministry to his own people was in order to confirm the absolute faithfulness of God to his Word, specifically to the promises he made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God pledged to Abraham that he would provide a progeny that would culminate in a Redeemer.<sup>6 7</sup> Those promises were fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

Don't minimize the importance of the Jewish people in history. God sent his Son into the world as a Jew. Jesus is the fulfillment of 2,000 years of Jewish history. The very existence of the Jews as a people is a wonder.

Anne Rice, a novelist known for writing vampire stories, described her turning from atheism to becoming a believer says in her book **Christ the Lord**, *"I stumbled upon a mystery without a solution, a mystery so immense that I gave up trying to find an explanation because the whole mystery defied belief. The mystery was the survival of the Jews. . . It was this mystery that drew me back to God."*

The survival of the Jews and Jesus' coming into this world as a Jew is an evidence for all who will examine the evidence of the truthfulness of God's Word, a demonstration of his faithfulness to fulfill what he has promised.

As Alberto played on the trumpet for the offertory, *Great Is Thy Faithfulness, O God my Father!* What God has promised, he will bring to pass.

Jesus came as a **servant of the Jews**, but he served them in God's way, not theirs. The people wanted a conquering hero, who would overthrow the Romans. In fact, they were ready to make him king on several occasions. They also desired to have their material needs provided – giving them free meals for example – and when he didn't meet their expectations they quickly turned against him.

But what God wanted was to provide for them a Savior. That is what the heart of the promises made to the patriarchs. They were told of a Redeemer who would come, and they were

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<sup>6</sup> Galatians 3:16

<sup>7</sup> This was a salutary reminder to the strong Gentile element in the church at Rome that Jewish believers should not be slighted or depreciated.

saved by looking to him and trusting him for what he would one day do. (We are all saved by the what Jesus did on the cross on our behalf. Old Testament saints were saved looking forward to the cross, we are saved looking back at the cross, but the cross is at the center of all who believe).

Jesus **did** come to bring salvation first to the Jews.

But that's not where he stopped, nor was it his only or primary purpose in coming to earth.

As we continue to read in **verse 9** he came as a Jew, confirming God's promises, **Romans 15:9a so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy . . .**

In the very act of serving the Jews by leaving heaven's glory and coming into this world and dying for their sins, Jesus not only confirmed the promises made to the Jews, he also served and had mercy on the Gentiles.<sup>8</sup>

God's purposes were never exclusively limited to the nation of Israel, since over and over in Scripture the Gentiles are viewed as being included in and embracing the saving mercy of God.<sup>9</sup>

To support his premise, Paul quotes David, Moses and Isaiah.

The passages aren't chosen in a haphazard fashion, but are carefully selected in a particular progressive order:

**1. God being praised amidst the Gentile nations. Vs. 9b** *"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name"* is quoting **Psalm 18:49** David was the great conqueror of the heathen Gentile nations surrounding Israel. He built up the powerful kingdom over which his son Solomon would reign in peace.

But all these victories, David says, also means that now he can proclaim the greatness of God and sing and play songs in the

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<sup>8</sup> Here's how Paul puts it in **Galatians 3:28-29** *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

<sup>9</sup> Consequently the Jewish believers in Paul's time should not consider it contradictory for God to lavish his grace on the nations through the gospel.

midst of the nations that will glorify his great name. His goal isn't that they merely hear nice music, and listen, but that by bringing the Name of the Lord to them they too might join in worshipping him and singing praise to him.

**2. The nations joining in praising God with the Jews.**

**Romans 15:10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."** This second quotation, found in **Deuteronomy 32:43**, is part of the Song of Moses which he composed for the people of Israel shortly before his death. Not only were hymns or songs a means of praising God, they also have a teaching function. In this case a major portion of the hymn reminds the people of the various ways God has been good to them, and another portion warns them not to depart from the worship of God lest terrible things happen to them.

The Gentiles are called on to reflect on how God has blessed and often miraculously provided for the Jewish people, and join with the Jews in joyous celebration of God's goodness and faithfulness.

**3. The Gentiles praising God on their own.**

**Romans 15:11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."**

Is quoting **Psalms 117:1** Nations praising God not only with the faithful Israelites, or for what God has done for the Israelites, but giving him praise and honor and glory for his sovereignty, his greatness, his love and mercy on their own.

Could literally translate the imperatives as (1) first "be praising" – sense of ongoing duration; continual praise and (2) second with *epi upon* **"heap up praise on him!"**

**4. Romans 15:12 And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will rise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."** His final quotation is from **Isaiah 11:10.**

Isaiah is looking forward to that promised descendant of David who will bring in the messianic age, rising to rule not only Jews but Gentiles, many of whom will place their hope/trust in him. Jesus is *"the root-sprout"* of Jesse<sup>10</sup> (the father of King David).

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<sup>10</sup> *Ha ritza* refers to a live root that sends up a sprout.

Paul's point is that there is hope for the Gentiles because Jesus is the Savior of the world, not just the Savior of the Jews.

**Isaiah 11:10** reads, *"The root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him . . ."* This is an astounding thing. This is nothing but the hand of God at work! A mere root-sprout descendant of a defunct royal Jewish house is raised up, lifted up, and becomes the rallying standard of Gentiles the world over. He is the hope of the world of all nations.

"Hope for the Gentiles" was a major component of Paul's thinking. It was important to him personally, because, as he often reminded people, he was chosen by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

How Jewish believers should praise God when they look at the Gentiles who have gathered under his standard, how the Gentile believers should praise God when they look at their fellow Jewish believers, of the race from which our Savior came!

When Paul wrote this epistle, Jews and Gentiles together were worshipping under the banner of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Ruler of their hearts. Paul calls on them to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one united heart and voice.

Paul chooses these four Old Testament passages to demonstrate that Jesus' becoming a servant of the Jews for their salvation wasn't limited, but that from the beginning God's salvation design was not limited to Jews. He choose the Jews to be the pathway through which he would bring salvation to and bless all the peoples of the world!

When called Abraham, founder and patriarch of the Jewish people, he promised **Genesis 12:2,3** *"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

That last phrase makes it clear that the blessing was to embrace all the families of the earth – <sup>3</sup>*and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

God had promised many material blessings – including a land of his own, descendants that will increase to be a great nation, a famous name, and the promise of future blessings and

prosperity. But that's not all. The best is yet to come! In addition to those physical blessings, God promises a spiritual blessing that will overflow from Abraham to all the families of the earth.

Abraham's greatest descendant will be the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom blessing would come to people of every nation who call on his name.

God's choice of Abraham wasn't a narrowing of God's concern for all people, but a selection of one family, which would grow into a nation, to communicate his message to all the families and nations of the world.

Today we are the beneficiaries of God's promises to Abram. That we who are non-Jews participate in that blessing is made clear by Paul in **Galatians 3:14** *"He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit."*

From these four verses of Romans we get an Old Testament snapshot of the unity and oneness of the Christian Church, which merges the most diverse cultural elements into perfect homogeneity in Jesus.

Mutual acceptance includes the need to overcome all racial prejudice and discrimination. In Jesus' church we welcome one another, accept one another, weak or strong, across cultural and ethnic divides, Jew or Gentile.

That reality underlies our identity as a church that is **intentionally bi-lingual, multi-cultural and inter-generational.**

Our oneness centers in Jesus Christ and in God the Father. Being of one heart and mouth doesn't mean that believers are intended to see eye-to-eye on everything.

But the more Jesus Christ fills our spiritual vision, the more we are focused on him, the greater will be our cohesiveness and the more we will attract people to Christ.

Let's put it this way: *"The centripetal magnetism of the Lord can effectively counter the centrifugal force of individual judgment and opinion."* Don't you love that quote? I wish I had said it, but I can't take credit for it.

You say, 'huh?'"

Let me explain. I need someone to come and **swirl this tennis ball on the end of a rope.**

**Centripetal** is Latin phrase meaning “**center seeking.**” Centripetal force always points to the center of the circle.

E.g. swinging a ball on end of rope. Centripetal force is the tension on the rope always pulling an object toward the center of a circle.

If line is cut – the ball will fly off in a straight line. That would illustrate **centrifugal force**, which is **center fleeing** force.

If you took physics you might recall the formula  $F = m v^2 / r$  Centripetal force is mass times velocity squared over radius.

On screen have **photos of a roller coaster doing a loop and the moon orbiting the sun.** They also illustrate **centripetal force.**

**Centripetal magnetism** is being drawn to the center. It's what keeps roller coasters on the track as they go through a loop-de-loop.

The force of gravity is a centripetal force pulling the moon in a circular path around the earth. If earth's gravity ceased to exist the moon would fly off in a straight line. (And just think what would happen to each of us – we'd be flung into outer space).

Point is this: If we're each focused on self, with our own agendas, flying off in our own direction every which way, we won't attract anyone. In fact will likely repel them.

Disunity distracts believers, discourages seekers, and discredits the Savior. But if we're all focused on, fixated on, centered on Jesus Christ it will create a strong magnetic pull attracting people to Christ.

Jesus prayed on the night he was betrayed, **John 17:23** ***May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me.***

The global purpose of God is to be glorified among the nations. When will the world believe that Jesus was sent by God to the earth? When we have better evangelism tools or nicer buildings or prettier music or more eloquent sermons? No. The world will believe when we learn to work and act as one.

**CLOSE:** Diana singing “**Make us one**” twice (eyes closed, no words on screen) followed by all standing and singing together (words on screen).