

Christ Our Example

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

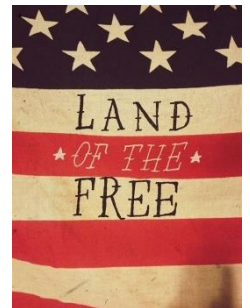
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.

July 2, 2023

Text: Romans 15:1-13

Purpose: Paul is reminding us to receive others that are weaker in their faith to allow them the opportunity to mature in the faith. If Christ was willing to submit to the will of the Father to the point of crucifixion, we too should be willing to submit one to another. When we center our focus on worship, we become unified with each other and with God.

The Fourth of July was coming up, and the nursery school teacher took the opportunity to tell her class about patriotism. "We live in a great country," she said. "One of the things we should be happy about is that, in this country, we are all free."



One little boy came walking up to her from the back of the room. He stood with his hands on his hips and said, "I'm not free. I'm four."¹

R. Kent Hughes, in his commentary on the Book of Romans asks this question: "What would you do if you knew you only had twenty-four hours to live?"

What would you do now if you knew you had only 24 hours to live?

All of us have pondered that question at different times in our life. I am sure none of us would go home immediately and begin to scrub the kitchen floor and vacuum the house. Who would want to clean the bathroom or mow the yard knowing that the next day they would be dead?

We may go sky diving or bungee jumping. But in all honesty, we probably would call our family and tell them that we love them. We would seek out those that are the most important to us, and spend our last hours with them.

None of us actually know when our last twenty-four hours will be. But there was one man who knew when and how he would die. That man was Jesus Christ. He spent the last twenty-four hours of His life with those he loved. He celebrated the Jewish holiday of Passover with His disciples and reinterpreted its meaning for all that would call upon His name to be their Savior.

Jesus understood the significance of these moments with His band of followers. He even prayed that they would be unified in their relationships with one another just as Jesus was one with the Father.



“Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom you have given Me, that they may be one as We are.” (John 17:11b)

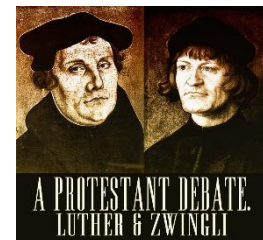
The unity between Jesus and His Father was unparalleled. They mutually edified each other because They were One. Jesus is asking that we do the same for each other. For

centuries since the death of Christ, this one area, unity, has been the most challenging for the Body of Christ.



The Apostolic Church that succeeded so well in the Book of Acts also had its problems. The church at Galatia was ravaged with legalism. The church in Corinth was divided in how they should respond to a member involved in incest. Pergamum was divided over the issue of Christians marrying non-Christians. And in Revelation 3:16, the church at Laodicea was so lukewarm that it made the Lord sick.

As any student of church history knows, there has rarely been a time when believers in Jesus Christ could agree on one thing. A recent showing of the movie about the Crusades during the Middle Ages indicates that Christianity was used as a way of forcing others to convert to the Catholic church’s teachings. The Protestant Reformation began as a protest against the sale of indulgencies by the Catholic Church.



But even those that broke away could not agree. Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, parted company over the phrase used during communion – *“this is my body.”* Unity in the body is the prayer of Christ for His Bride – the church.

Churches have split over the smallest of matters. I read of two churches that were small and struggling and they decided to come together and form one strong church. But

they were not able to come together in unity. The problem centered around the “Lord’s Prayer.” One group wanted to continue to use the phrase “*forgive us or debts*” while the other wanted to use the phrase “*forgive us our trespasses.*” The local newspaper reported that they split up with one group returning to their “debts” while the other returned to their “trespasses.”



Last week we explored the idea that we are not to judge one another in such matters. Paul identified the two parties as “weaker” and “stronger.” Some people are so concerned about the minor details of the faith that Paul called them the “weaker” ones. Paul continues on with this idea in chapter fifteen.

Christ’s Unifying Example: Not Self-Seeking (v. 1-6)

“We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.” (v. 1, 2)



Paul’s advice is for us not to be self seeking. Those of us that are stronger need to consider the minor issues in the exercising of our faith and attempt to work with the weaker individual. The purpose in “bending” on these issues that are not essential is to help the other individual become stronger.

Granted, there are some individuals that are prone to be judgmental. They are quick to size up another person and determine if they meet the proper standard. Those quick to judge individuals have a difficult time following the advice of Paul.

What exactly is Paul trying to tell us when he tells the “strong” person “*to please his neighbor for his good?*”

Paul is not advocating that we become “pleasers of men” simply to win their approval and acceptance. In Galatians 1:10 Paul addresses that issue. “*Am I now to win the approval of men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*”



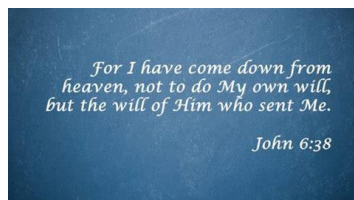
In this Romans passage, Paul is advocating the stronger to bend in some areas if it will contribute to the spiritual good of the other person. We don’t necessarily need to bend to the weakest member of the fellowship, but we need to guide them towards spiritual maturity.

For those that are spiritually mature, it would be easy to look at another and say, “You need to change in this area, if you are to ever be mature like me.” Paul wants us to have forbearance one for another.

To illustrate the importance of the stronger bending to the weaker, he uses Christ as the perfect example of one that is stronger making allowances for the weaker.

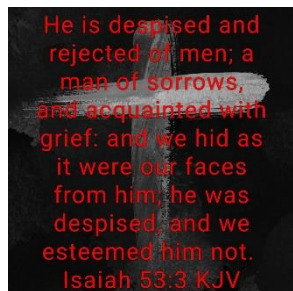
“For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproach of those who reproached You fell on me.’”
(v. 3)

Prior to coming to earth as a baby in a manger, Jesus Christ dwelt with God eternally in the Godhead in perfect holiness. He left that perfect estate to take on the form of a man to come and redeem mankind. He did not come for His own good; He came for our own good. He came at the will of the Father to do the will of the Father. John 6:38 says, *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”*



In doing the will of the Father, Jesus faced the cruelest of treatments. Paul is quoting from Psalm 69:9 which says, *“And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.”* Christ was so focused upon His task here on earth, that He willingly endured the cross for our sake. He was able to look beyond his “rights” or “position” simply for the sake of those that were weaker.

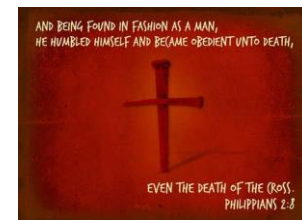
“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah 53:3)



Paul reminds us that just as Christ submitted for the good of others, we also should submit to the needs of others for the sake of unity.

Our attitude should be the same as Christ’s. In Philippians 2:5-8 we are given another word about Christ our example.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”



Paul goes on further and advises us to *“work out our salvation with fear and trembling.”* *“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”* (Phil 2:14-15)

We may be sitting here thinking that having the mind of Christ is totally impossible. But we are instructed to strive towards unity and bearing one another up as Christ bears us up. Not only has Jesus given us the pattern for our life, he has given us the power to do it.



The power to live a victorious Christian Life is found in the word of God. The scripture, both old and new, have been given to us to edify and build up our understanding of God and His plan of salvation for mankind.

In verse four, Paul tells us that these things were “*written for our learning, that we through patience (endurance) and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*” We learn to walk stronger in the Lord the more we read and understand His total word. We draw the nourishment we need to make it in this life as we study His word and hide them in our hearts.



This nourishment from the scripture will enable us to walk in unity among one another. When there is disharmony, there are those that are walking in selfish motives and self-centered plans. Verse six points out the primary method in which believers can become one. We become unified when we focus on what we worship.

“That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (15:6)

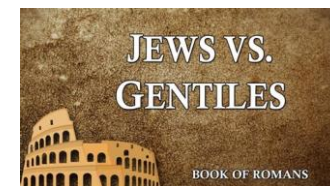
Over the years, I have had the opportunity to hear many different Christian groups in concert. While there I experienced an awesome presence of worship and reverence for God. There have been other times in a regular worship service, I have experienced the same presence of God during a time of worship. When that occurred, I did not sense any division or dissension. There gathered in one place was a group of people with one mind and one voice singing praises to God as the creator and sustainer of all the earth.

Sadly, in some places of worship, worship has become weak and praise to God is limited because of a lack of love

among the fellowship of believers. Becoming a unified church in love takes work and persistence. It is essential for the mature believers to take the high road because Christ took it first.

Christ’s Unifying Example: Accepting Both Jew and Gentile (v. 7-13)

Paul’s concluding verses point to the fact that this gospel is not only for the Jews. He quotes from several places in the Old Testament that the good news of salvation was also for the Gentiles. There should not be any Jews vs. the Gentiles thinking. God is calling all to be in unity with the Lord. Both are accepted and received when Jesus Christ is accepted and received. Even the Old Testament testified to the truth that this message of salvation was also for the Gentiles.



2 Samuel 22:50 and Psalm 18:49 tell us: *“For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.”*

Deuteronomy 32:4 says, *“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.”*

Psalm 117:1 says, *“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!”*

And Isaiah 11:10 says, *“There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope.”*

If you think about the diversity among the Jews and Gentiles, it is amazing that they ever came together to worship at all. When we take our eyes off ourselves and focus on Christ, we are able to walk together in unity. It is amazing to me that God could love a sinner like me. He has accepted me as I am – temperament, personality, and sin prone nature. He has accepted each of us with our shortcomings, our stubbornness, and biases.

Paul tells us to receive one another, just as Christ has received us. In doing so, we all may glorify God for His name's sake.



None of us knows when our last twenty-four hours will be. But we know how we should live with each other – in unity.

One of our greatest examples of unity we can demonstrate in this community is for us to participate in the Lord's Supper. It is a time where the gathered church can come together around table of the Lord – reflect on the sacrifice Christ made – leaving heaven in order to restore our relationship with the Father.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹Mickey' Funnies, A Fourth Funny, June 29, 2018