

On the Altar (6): A Spirit of Unity

(Romans 15:1-12)

I. Introduction

- A. Songs today have stressed the theme “*Praise the Lord, all ye nations*”
1. The Hebrew word “goy” (“*nations*”) is also the word for “*Gentiles*”
 - a. It originally meant “*people*” but came to mean “*non-Jewish people*”
 - b. In modern Hebrew and Yiddish, the word “goy” is the term for a Gentile.
 2. Throughout the OT, Israel had mission to the nations. *Some examples*
 - a. If Israel followed the Law, show God’s wisdom to the nations (**Deut 4:6**)
 - b. If Israel didn’t obey Law, they’d be object of scorn to nations (**Dt 28:37**)
 - c. Israel’s worship would make God known to the nations (**Psalms 98:1-2**)
 - d. Israel’s Messiah would bring God’s justice to the nations (**Isa 42:1**)
 - e. And so Israel would be used by God as a light to the nations (**Isa 49:6**)
 3. Israel was God’s chosen people, chosen to show God’s goodness to world
 - a. What the Jews tended to stress was their status as the chosen people
 - 1) They looked with antipathy and antagonism on all who weren’t Jews.
 - 2) Israel’s special covenant with God was to make Him known to all
 - b. So David proclaims, “*I will praise you O God among the nations*” (**Psa 57:9**)
- B. We’ve been looking at **Romans 12-16** and what it means to be living sacrifices
1. Paul’s application of grace is that we are to live graciously with each other
 - a. We use our gifts to build the body; we live lovingly with one another.
 - b. Last week: How we are to live graciously with others when we disagree
 2. In our text today, Paul quotes OT “*among the nations*” texts (**Rom 15:8-12**)
 - a. Paul sees Jesus as a servant of both the Jews (**15:8**) and Gentiles (**15:9**)
 - 1) These OT quotes illustrate God’s interest in including the Gentile
 - 2) That is Paul’s life; he identifies himself minister to Gentiles (**15:16**)
 - b. But before the church could be the light to nations, they had to live light
 - c. The church at Rome had to live out God unity and peace themselves before they could fulfill their mission of being God’s light to the world.
- C. Let’s look at what Paul says about peace and unity (**Read: Romans 15:1-7**)

II. Bearing with One Another

- A. Last week, we looked at disciples and disagreements over issues of faith
1. **Basic Point:** “Accept him whose faith is weak, w/o passing judgment” ([14:1](#))
 2. We can’t always have a meeting of minds, but we must have one of hearts
 3. We saw that Paul’s command to accept one another means several things—
 - a. **First**, it means we’ll others without **looking down** on them ([14:3](#))
 - b. **Second**, it means that we will refuse to **judge their motives** ([14:6](#))
 - c. **Third**, it means we’ll give up trying to argue all into submission. ([14:22](#))
 - d. **Fourth**, it means we’ll love others more we do getting our way. ([14:15](#))
- B. In [Romans 15](#), Paul continues to call us to unity despite our differences.
1. Here he insists the strong OUGHT to bear with the failings of weak ([15:1](#))
 - a. We use “*ought*” in a fairly weak way, “*I really ought to loose weight.*”
 - b. The word Paul uses here literally is “*to be in debt.*” It is **obligation**.
 - 1) Unmerciful servant says, “*Pay me what you OWE me*” ([Matt 18:28](#)).
 - 2) Paul said earlier in book, “*Let no debt remain outstanding*” ([13:8](#)).
 - c. Here our debt or obligation is to put up with flaws of other disciples.
 2. The NCV says that we “*should help the weak with their weaknesses*”
 - a. The word “*weak*” (ἀδύνατος) literally means “*incapable or powerless.*”
 - 1) It’s the word used for the “*crippled*” man Paul healed in [Acts 14:8](#).
 - 2) It’s used for the powerlessness of the Law to save in [Romans 8:3](#).
 - b. The “*weak*” here are not just rebellious or stubborn— they are powerless
 - 1) Jew who was focused on kosher foods was powerless not to be!
 - 2) Growth would eventually change him; arguing on issues would not
 - c. Those stronger in the faith are to patiently walk with those who are weak
 3. There’s an related word used by Jesus in *opposite sense* in [Matthew 23:4](#)
 - a. Pharisees put heavy burdens on people and wouldn’t help them bear them
 - 1) Their traditions became a load that simply weighed people down
 - 2) That effectively “*shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces*” ([23:7](#))
 - b. That’s the opposite of church—we are to help the weak carry burden
 - c. Paul wants the strong of the church to help carry the load of the weak.

- C. But that DEMANDS that we aren't so focused on getting our own way (**15:2-3**)
1. We must decide if we'll "*please ourselves*" (**15:1**) or "*please others*" (**15:2**)
 - a. The example of Jesus is that he pleased us, not himself, all cross (**15:3**)
 - b. Once again, the cross calls us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices
 - 1) So sometimes we set aside what we want for others (**Phil 2:3-4**)
 - 2) We do so remembering One who sacrificed for us (**Phil 2:5ff**)
 - c. So who is it that we will please? Ourselves? Others? *What pleases God?*
 2. Ricky Nelson's classic "*Garden Party*" focuses on expectations of others
*But then it's all right now, I learned my lesson well—
 You see, you can't please everyone, so you got to please yourself*
 - a. He's right; you can't please everyone— you'd just go crazy trying to!
 - b. Remember the Aesop fable of the man and the boy leading the donkey?
 - 1) Some criticized them because they led the donkey instead of riding
 - 2) The boy rode, and they criticized. The man rode, and they criticized.
 - 3) So they carried donkey & dropped him off the bridge and he died.
 - c. Aesop's moral of the fable: "*Please all, and you will please none.*"
 3. OK, we can't please everyone; so we **please God**, not just please ourselves.
 - a. What does God want me to do? *Not insist on my own way all the time!*
 - b. To be like Jesus, we must seek the good of others, not ours (**1 Cor 10:24**)
- D. I know how to get my way, but HOW do I learn to give that up? **3 Things**—
1. **First**, Paul suggests that it is through "*endurance*" (*perseverance*, NASB)
 - a. There are two main words that are translated "*patience*" in the NT
 - 1) μακροθυμία ("*long-suffering*") is a self-restraint without retaliation
 - 2) ὑπομονή ("*endurance*") is the steadfast refusal to give up or give in
 - b. So we learn to sacrifice for others by refusing to give up on relationship
 - c. Learn that by practice (Dad said "*No*" because he said "*Yes*" last time)
 2. **Second**, Paul points us to the encouragement of the scriptures
 - a. The context of "*What was written aforetime was written for our learning*"
 - b. Scripture teaches what happens of we defer our desires for greater good!
 - c. What's the point of stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses? *Do what's right!*

3. **Third**, Paul prays that God give them a “*spirit of unity*” (**15:5-6**)
 - a. Maybe the secret is prayer— God creates unity; God gives spirit of unity
 - 1) This phrase literally means “*to be the same attitude or mind!*”
 - 2) Paul uses this same word in making the same point in **Phil 2:2**.
 - 3) Literally, “*Be of one mind, one in love, of one mind and one mind!*”
 - b. That doesn’t say agree on the issue; Paul tells them to disagree (*quietly*)
 - c. God gives us endurance and encouragement; He gives a spirit of unity!
 - d. But first we have to get over ourselves and our need to get our own way!

III. Conclusion

- A. See if this sounds like there is something of a pattern ringing in her somewhere
 1. In **Romans 15**, Paul quotes a medley of texts on gospel and the Gentiles
 - a. But that follows a section on disciples getting along in “*spirit of unity*”
 - b. Before we can be a light to nations, we must learn to accept each other.
 - c. And the reason we are given for being able to do that is the cross.
 2. In **Phil 2**, Paul tells us we are to “*shine like stars in the universe.*” (**2:15**)
 - a. That follows **v. 14**, “*Do everything without complaining or arguing.*”
 - b. That follows a section on having one mind & considering other (**2:1-4**)
 - c. Again, what compels us to sacrifice for each other is the cross. (**2:5-11**)
 3. In **John 13**, Jesus says the world knows we are disciples by our love
 4. In **John 17**, Jesus prays we will love so world will know God sent Him
- B. See the pattern? We are a light to nations and we shine like stars... WHEN?
 1. By loving each other so that differences are overshadowed by the cross
 - a. World doesn’t need a church that is fussing and feuding among itself!
 - b. World can do that on its own! It needs a love that transcends differences
 2. What about the church confuses the world? *Doctrines and denominations?*
 - a. I don’t think that confuses people that much; they understand variety
 - b. What is confusing is that we’re so bad at practicing what Jesus preached
 - 1) Christians are just not all that good at loving one another
 - 2) In fact we have a nasty reputation of fighting among ourselves
 3. May God of wonders grant us the miracle of a spirit of unity! (**Rom 15:13**)