

Title: Welcoming One Another
Biblical Text: Romans 15:5-7
Teaching Series: Justified by Love
Preaching Date: September 17, 2023
Preacher: Jason C. Helveston

Romans 15:5-7

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Today Paul prays for us. It's customary in the Apostle's writings that he almost interrupts himself to intercedes for his readers. In fact, he's going to pray for us again in v.13. But here Paul has one thing in mind: *unity*. He asks God to help us live with harmony with one another. So, that's what I want to talk about. I want to talk about what it means to live in harmony, particularly as followers of Jesus. After all, everywhere we look there are pushes and pulls for us to be divided and divisive, *aren't there?* Whether we consider politics or our social ethics or our football teams, we're constantly drawing lines in the sand and being forced to pick sides.

Now, Paul is not going to tell us to agree about everything. Harmony isn't about agreeing on everything. Remember, all of chapters 14 and 15 have been dealing

with the understood tensions and differences between who he's described as the *weak* and *strong*. Harmony is about so much more than having the same ideas. Harmony is about having the same central affections. We may disagree on doctrines but we are in full accord in our loves. So, *what's that look like?*

Well, here's how we'll organize our time ...

- The *challenge* of harmony.
- The *purpose* of harmony.
- The *motivation* of harmony.

[Prayer]

Movement 1: The Challenge of Harmony (v.5, Matthew 6:9, Ephesians 4:3, Romans 1:18, 2:2b, 12:5)

Okay, so Paul is praying. He's praying to God. Pastor Tim Keller describes prayer as a response to the knowledge of God. More specifically Keller writes that "*The power of our prayers ... lies not primarily in our effort and striving, or in any technique, but rather in our knowledge of God*" (Prayer, 45,49). This is why Jesus begins his now famous instructions on prayer in Matthew 6 simply by describing God as the one who is *Father* ... the one who is in *heaven* ... and the one who is *hallowed* or *holy* (see Matthew 6:9). Paul does the same thing here in

Romans 15. It's good practice for all of us to season our prayers with the confession and celebration of who God is and what he's like.

So Paul prays for you and me, his readers. *Read Romans 15:5 ... May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus ...* You see, he begins by simply describing God. He's the God of endurance. He's the God of encouragement. However, in describing God he's also beginning his request. The words *endurance* and *encouragement* are in what's called the genitive case in the original Greek language. That means as interpreters and readers we have a decision to make. *Is Paul describing God as the God who **has** endurance and encouragement? Or, who **is** enduring and encouraged? Or, as the one who **gives** endurance and encouragement?* Well, when we consider the general idea, all of those options make sense. All of those are true. However, when we look at the immediate context, Paul is asking God to give us the gift of harmony or unity with one another. Therefore, it's probably best to understand that Paul is asking God to give us endurance and encouragement as part of that gift to empower us to experience harmony with one another.

Now this idea of harmony, again, doesn't mean we agree on everything. Rather, the more literal rendering is to *set your minds on the same thing*. It's about focus. It's about primacy. It's about keeping the main thing, the main thing. So, this all checks out. In order to experience harmony we need to endure the challenges of disharmony ... and we're going to need a lot of encouragement along the way. You

see, by God's grace we're not only called to harmony but in Christ we are empowered to overcome the things that cause disunity. There are a lot of things we make central which aren't central. That's is the **challenge** of harmony. And primarily the Lord has given us his Spirit to enable us to maintain harmony within our church family. In fact, when he was writing to Christians in Ephesus, Paul told us to be, ***Read Ephesians 4:3 ... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*** We're supposed to be eager for unity, not disunity. But it's the Spirit who ultimately holds us together.

This would be good for us to consider more deeply. *What are the particular challenges to harmony we face? What creates disunity in our church? Why is divine endurance and encouragement necessary?* There are many reason. Money seeks to create disunity. Our disagreement on secondary issues. Pride divides us. Control or power; who gets power and resources and so on. But I'd like to look briefly at three Paul has taught about in Romans the most.

- Religion is a challenge to harmony. This is what Paul has dealt with considerably throughout Romans. When we center doctrine, religious rules, and our spiritual preferences, we cause division and disunity. Specifically because it leads to judgmentalism and a void of mercy and grace. Paul said back in Roman 2, ***Read Romans 2:2b ... For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.*** Legalism and judgmentalism are without love. And we can't have harmony without love.

- Tolerance is also a challenge to harmony. We looked at this a couple weeks ago, but it's the modern remedy to religion or moralism. While secular tolerance may seem unifying at first blush, it doesn't unify us too anything true because in order for tolerance to be embraced we have to let go of the idea of universal truth. So, it actually causes disunity. Remember, back in Romans 1. Paul explained, *Read Romans 1:18 ... For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* Tolerance misses truth. And we can't have harmony without truth.
- Individualism is a challenge to harmony. When we fail to see ourselves as part of a family or community, we learn to think about ourselves in isolation. Even as Christians. We think life with God is simply about me and God, rather than us. Sometime we do this out of protection; the church has used power and theology to hurt and harm and so we isolate. Other time we do this out of pride. While we enjoy our friendships within church community, they are not part of our identity. Yet Romans 12 tell us, *Read Romans 12:5 ... so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.* Individualism fails to see the beauty of wholeness and family. And we can't have harmony without each other.

In each of these challenges, we need endurance and encouragement. We need to endure beyond the temptation of moralism and see the beauty of grace. We need to

endure beyond the temptation of tolerance and see the power of truth. We need to endure beyond the temptation of individualism and see our identity wrapped up with all of God's people. That's the *challenge* of harmony. So, *what's the purpose of it all?*

Movement 2: The Purpose of Harmony (v.6, Luke 10:38-40,41-42, Romans 12:1)

Let's keep in mind, harmony is about *setting out minds on the same thing*. So the first step in considering the purpose of harmony is to understand what it is we're supposed to be mindful of together. Perhaps this won't be surprising but that one thing, that main thing is Jesus himself. Notice how Paul concludes v.5, ***Read Romans 15:5b ... in accord with Christ Jesus.*** Harmony is about setting our minds on Christ.

This reality and the challenge of it all is famously illustrated when Jesus was visiting a pair of sisters, Mary and Martha. Meet me in Luke 10. ***Read Luke 10:38-40 ... Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."*** Okay, so Martha greeted Jesus but then got to work. Mary on the other hand, sat down. She paused. She listened. She rested. And so it's not surprising there's no harmony. Their minds

are not set on the same thing. After Martha asks Jesus for help ... to tell her sister to get to work ... here's how Jesus responds. *Read Luke 10:41-42 ... **But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."*** Okay, so Jesus doesn't simply confirm that Mary was right and that Martha is distracted. But Jesus also teaches all of us what ensures harmony ... himself. He is the good portion. In other words, Martha will know peace not when Mary starts working as hard as her, but rather when Martha sets her mind on Christ, just like Mary.

- The religious person isn't centered on Christ because they overlook his love.
- The tolerant person isn't centered on Christ because they neglect his truth.
- The individualist isn't centered on Christ because they abandon his family.

Therefore each of these fails to fulfill the *purpose* of harmony. That's where Paul takes us next. Back to Romans 15. *Read Romans 15:6 ... **that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** Harmony leads to worship. Paul says harmony leads us to glorify the Heavenly Father.

Marva Dawn explains that worship is "*our most festive function in life ... The more we adore the Trinity and acclaim the Lord's works, the more we will fall in love with God and the more worshipfully we will live*" (*In the Beginning God*, 113). When we're centered on the Lord together, we worship him together. When we worship him together, we enjoy and love him more. Worship, we say, is generative. It produces more and more worship. This is our purpose. And it's

wholistic. Though here Paul seems to focus on our singing here, back in Romans 12 he said, ***Read Romans 12:1 ... I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*** Worship is about our hearts and our voices and our bodies.

To worship or glorify God is a fundamental practice of Christianity. Glory is a word which finds little correlation in common Greek parlance. The New Testament writers were after something unique to the Christian story and the God of the Bible. Theologian and Greek scholar Gerhard Kittel says that glory "***denotes divine and heavenly radiance, the loftiness and majesty of God, and even the being of God and His world***" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* , 237). And so what we are doing when we glorify God is acknowledging this about him ... we're celebrating who he is ... we're naming what he does ... we're describing him accurately ... we're loving him in truth ... we're ordering our lives in accordance with his character. You see, to glorify God is to simply agree with the reality of who he is. Just like we pray.

Harmony is not about agreeing on everything. It's not about centering everyone's perspective and preferences. Nor is it about avoiding conflict through isolation. Rather, harmony is about our affections. It's about centering our lives on Christ which results in unified hearts, words, and bodies that glorify God. That's the ***purpose*** of harmony: *worship and glory*. But, ***what's our motivation?*** You might be wondering, *why should we glorify God?*

Movement 3: The Motivation for Harmony (v.7,

Romans 5:1-2)

As a boy the prominent atheist Christopher Hitchens remembers having a real problem with the call for believers to worship and glorify God. He asks at the beginning of his his book *god is not Great*, "***Why, if god was the creator of all things, were we supposed to 'praise' him so incessantly for doing what came to him naturally? This seemed servile, apart from anything else***" (3). It's a fair question. Hitchens goes on to say, not simply that God's demand for glory and worship seems incredibly egotistical, but also that he's ultimately unworthy of such adulation. *If he could heal the blind, why not blindness? If he could feed 5000, why not end hunger? If God is good, then why all this bad? Why not end slavery?* Perhaps you've wondered the same thing.

Those are important questions. While we could, and many have done a deep dive into what's known as the problem of evil and the pang for justice in the human heart, we won't do that today. Instead we should consider what Paul has to say in Romans 15 as our motivation for this harmony that leads to worship. ***Read Romans 15:7 ... Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*** The motivation for worship and harmony isn't that every question or reason not to worship God has been answered. Rather the motivation for harmony is the way Jesus showed up for us. Paul says, we should welcome each other or we should live in harmony because Jesus welcomed us. Jesus brought

harmony between us and God. This was Paul's primary point back in chapter 5.

Read Romans 5:1-2 ... Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Jesus has secured our peace with God and therefore we can and should live in peace ... despite our different opinions, choices, and beliefs about secondary issues ... despite the fact that some of us are weak and others strong ... we can endure ... we can be encouraged ... as God's people we can set our minds on Christ.

Why do we worship God?

Why do we live in harmony?

Why do we welcome one another?

Well certainly not because all our questions are answered. Nor so that we'd agree about everything. Rather, our *motivation* for harmony is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Many of our friends and neighbors say they would believe in Jesus, they would become a Christian if they had more of their questions answered. Perhaps that's you. You'd follow Jesus if you had a watertight argument for all that he claimed and all that the Scriptures claim to be true. However, that's now how this works. That's not how any relationship works. *Right?* I've heard it said, that instead of an watertight argument God gave us a watertight person. He gave us Jesus. He welcomed us into relationship. He made peace with you and me.

He made cosmic harmony a reality through faith. That's our motivation. The motivation to live in harmony is the harmony that gave us life.

That seems to be what Mary understood. She had set her mind on Jesus. He was her logic. He was her love. He was her truth. He was her family. He was her motivation.

Church, can you image if we got on the same page? Can you imagine if we set our minds on Christ? Can you imagine if everything else took a backseat to his glory? Can you imagine if we lived with harmony in a chaotic world? Can you imagine if we endured beyond religion, tolerance, and individualism? Can you imagine if we lived our lives as if Jesus had really and truly welcomed us? Well, I think we'd welcome one another ... and I think we'd welcome a bunch more people too.