

Pleasing One Another for the Sake of Christ

Scripture: Romans 15:1–7

Code: 45-112

INTRODUCTION

A. God's Concern for Unity

Discord strikes a deadly blow at God's work in the church. Chaos, strife, envy, anger, bitterness, dissension, and selfishness violate the unity of the church. Therefore, they violate the will of God and cripple His testimony in the world. The harmony of the church is of grave concern to God.

1. The concern of God the Father

Psalm 133:13 says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments. Like the dew of Hermon, and like the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." Unity is a sweet and fragrant offering to God.

In Jeremiah 32:38-39 God says the following concerning those who would some day become partakers of the New Covenant: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God. And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them."

a) His design for Israel (1) Ezekiel 37:16-17 The chapter begins with a vision of a valley of dry bones, which is a picture of God's regathering of the nation of Israel. But as the Lord looks ahead to the future glory of His redeemed nation, he says, "Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel, his companions; then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions; and join them one to another into one stick, and they shall become one in thy hand." Those two sticks represent the divided kingdom under Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Judah represents the southern Kingdom and Joseph the northern Kingdom. One day God will join together a divided Kingdom in final glory. Using sticks as symbols for the kingdoms would not have been foreign to Ezekiel's audience. Numbers 17:2 says every tribe had a stick to identify it. (2) Zephaniah 3:9 The Lord said, "Then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." (3) Zechariah 14:9 Zechariah writes, "The Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one." All the inhabitants of the earth will hold up the name of the Lord and exalt Him. (4) Hosea 1:11 The Lord said, "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel." God has long intended through the New Covenant to bring the nation of Israel together as one people. b) His design for the church Just as all the rebels will be purged out from the nation of Israel in the future so that it may be one, so it is in the church. In John 10:14-17 Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold [Gentiles]; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." It was God's purpose for Christ to lay down His life to redeem both Jew and Gentile and make them one people. God's desire is to make the nation of Israel one. It is also His desire to blend together the redeemed nation and

the redeemed church. That's reflected in 1 Corinthians 15:28: "When all things shall be subdued unto him [Christ], then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." God's desire is for all His people to be one, with one heart and one voice to the will of God. The unity of the redeemed is the purpose of God, and that purpose ultimately finds its outworking in eternal glory. Revelation 21:24 says, "I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." All redeemed people will be brought together with God as their King.

2. The concern of God the Son

In John 17:11 Jesus prays to the Father, "Now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." In verse 20 He says, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word." Jesus prayed not only for His disciples, but also for all who would believe in the future. The content of His prayer is: "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one" (vv. 21-22). It is the particular concern of God the Son that we be one.

3. The concern of God the Holy Spirit

In Acts 2:4 the believers were all filled with the Holy Spirit. As a result some wonderful things happened.

a) Acts 2:38, 41-46 Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). What was the result? Verses 41-46 say, "They that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart." The first characteristic of the redeemed was a unity of spirit. They were of one accord in praise, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, doctrine, proclamation, and sharing their goods. That was the result of God's Spirit within them. b) Acts 4:31-32 When the church had prayed, "the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of those that believed were of one heart and of one soul." The people responded as one when they were filled with the Holy Spirit. It is the desire of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit that we be one. We are to be one not only in terms of our position, but also in practice by sharing in our fellowship. Ephesians 4:3-6 gives us the details. Verse 3 says we're to be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." One of the primary tasks of the church is to maintain our unity, and that unity is reinforced by the Trinity. Verse 4 talks about the Spirit: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." Verse 5 talks about the Son: "[There is] one Lord, one faith, one baptism." And verse 6 talks about the Father: "[There is] one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

B. Scripture's Emphasis on Unity

Since unity is the will of the Trinity, we find it constantly emphasized in the New Testament.

1. 1 Corinthians 1:10 "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all

speaking the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

2. 1 Corinthians 3:12"I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with solid food; for to this time ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal; for there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"

3. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14"As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."

4. Galatians 3:26-28"Ye are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

5. Philippians 1:27"Let your conduct be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

6. Philippians 2:2"Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

7. Colossians 3:11, 14-15"There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all, and in all put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body."

8. 1 Peter 3:89"Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but on the contrary, blessing, knowing that ye are called to this, that ye should inherit a blessing."

9. 2 John 4"I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth."

10. 3 John 2, 4"I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

Paul realized that one of the great dangers to unity in the church is the potential discord between strong and weak Christians. Since unity is so essential to God, Paul found it essential to teach about it in Romans 14:1[en]15:13. In this lesson we will examine Romans 15:17: "We, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."

Throughout Romans 14:1[en]15:13 Paul emphasizes four major principles that must govern the relationship of strong and weak Christians. We are looking at the third one: pleasing one another with Christ as your example. We have to be concerned with pleasing others, not ourselves, to make unity a reality. If everyone aims only to please himself, we will have chaos. It is incumbent on strong believers to please the weak. This text has six principles for the strong to consider.

I. CONSIDERATION OF OTHERS (v. 1a)

"We, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak."

A. Showing Patience to the Weaker Brother

Being considerate of others is seeking to serve them with love rather than attack them with criticism. Paul encourages the strong believer to set aside his liberty and lovingly bear with the weak. Some

people are still bound to religious taboos from the past, and we need to be patient until they grow away from such things. Being considerate is the first attitude we must have before we can please someone else. Philippians 2:4 says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." We are to avoid things that might distress others. When someone struggles with some nonmoral thing you believe is right but he believes is wrong, be patient with him until he understands his freedom in Christ.

B. Owing a Debt to the Weaker Brother

1. Bearing the weak

The Greek word translated "ought" in Romans 15:1 means "to be a debtor." Paul uses the same word in Romans 1:14: "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians." Our debt is "to bear (Gk., *bastaz[ma]o*) the infirmities of the weak." That word is used more than twentyfive times in the New Testament. It does not communicate the idea of tolerating someone's inadequacy; it refers to carrying someone's load of shouldering his burden. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." The same word is used in Mark 14:13 and Luke 22:10 of carrying a water pitcher. In Luke 7:14 it's used of carrying a stretcher, in John 10:31 of carrying stones, in John 12:6 of carrying a bag of money, in Acts 15:10 of carrying a yoke, in Acts 21:35 of carrying a man, and in Revelation 17:7 of carrying a woman. In Romans 15:1 Paul is urging the strong to come under the weak believer, to walk along with him in his weakness until he can grow to understand his freedom. We need to carry the errors of the weak by coming alongside of them and nurturing them in their walk.

a) 1 Corinthians 9:19, 22 Paul said, "I am free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.... To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak." Although the context is different from Romans 15:1, the principle is the same. If we're going to gain the weak, we need to get under their load and shoulder it with them. b) Romans 13:8 Paul said, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another." That's a debt we'll never fully pay off; we'll always owe it.

2. Pleasing the weak

Some people will think Paul is saying we ought to be men pleasers. Galatians 1:10 defines a man pleaser as one who adjusts the gospel to fit what people want, and backs away from confronting sin. That's not what Paul is saying in Romans 15:1, nor is he saying we should be like Absalom, who was a man pleaser for his own gain. Absalom was the son of David, who wanted to dethrone his father. Second Samuel 15:23 says, "Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate; and it was that, when any man who had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee." As people came with grievances for the king, Absalom stopped them and sympathized with their plight. Then Absalom said, "Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man who hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was that, when any man came near to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (vv. 46). Absalom had an ulterior motive. He was a man pleaser for his own gains.

Paul is not telling us to please men by adjusting the gospel, ignoring sin, or attracting them to us for our own gain. He wants us to please those who need help in carrying the load of bondage they are not yet ready to give up. That's being considerate.

II. DISREGARD FOR SELF (vv. 1b2)

A. Making a Sacrifice for the Weaker Brother (v. 1b)

"Not to please ourselves."

Our pleasure is not the criterion for what we can or cannot do. That is not a spiritual approach. In

Philippians 2:19²¹ Paul says, "I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." What a sad commentary! People in whom Paul had invested a great deal of time were now seeking to fulfill their own desires and not those of Christ. The idea behind Christian liberty is that although you are free to do many things, you avoid what might offend or cause another believer to stumble.

B. Helping to Strengthen the Weaker Brother (v. 2)

"Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification."

No one gets off the hook everyone is obligated to please his neighbor with the goal of building him up. In Romans 14:19 Paul says, "Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, and things with which one may edify another."

Strong believers are responsible for the spiritual growth of the weak. That is not to say they should sacrifice God's truth for the sake of harmony, but they should set aside their liberty with regard to neutral things for the purpose of building up the weak. When a strong believer flaunts his liberty, the weak are made weaker. To lift them from their weakness, the strong must be sure to do what pleases them.

1. 1 Corinthians 10:23²⁴ Paul said, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth."

2. Philippians 2:13, 58 Paul said, "If there be, therefore, any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.... Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

III. CONFORMITY TO CHRIST (v. 3)

"Even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."

A. The Responsibility of Christ

Christ did not please Himself; He took the reproach of God. Christ suffered. If He really wanted to please Himself, He would have remained in glory with God. In John 17:5 He says, "O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

1. To please the Father

a) John 4:34 "Jesus saith unto [His disciples], My food is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." b) John 5:30 "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father who hath sent me." c) John 6:38 "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will but the will of him that sent me." d) John 8:25²⁹ The scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, "Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge of you; but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. They understood not that he spoke to them of the Father. Then said Jesus to them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." That was the bottom line for Christ. He did the things that pleased the Father. e) John 14:31 "That the world may know that I love the Father, and, as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." f) Hebrews 3:2 Christ Jesus "was faithful to him that appointed him." g) Hebrews 5:7⁸ Christ, "in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears [in the garden of Gethsemane] unto him that was able

to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared, though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." Christ cried out to the Father for deliverance, but God chose not to deliver Him. And Christ was perfectly content to obey Him, saying, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus came not to please Himself, but to please the Father. He is our pattern.

2. To please the elect

In pleasing the Father, Jesus was also able to please and bless us (John 17:24-26). No one compelled Jesus to do what He did. In John 10:18 He says, "No man taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again."

Christians are to conform to Christ. That means we seek to be like Him rather than make everyone be like us. And being like Him means we don't do what pleases us, but what pleases others.

B. The Reproach of Christ

"The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me" (Rom. 15:3) comes from Psalm 69. Much of that Psalm is about the Messiah and His agony. "They that hate me without a cause" (v. 4) speaks of men's hatred of the Lord. Verse 8 says, "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children." That verse was fulfilled in John 1:11: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Psalm 69:14-20 may well refer to Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsemane. "They gave me also gall for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (v. 21) refers to His crucifixion. But it is verse 9 that Paul quotes, and which says, "The reproaches of those who reproached thee are fallen upon me." In pleasing the Father, Christ received reproach: slander, false accusations, and insults. Christ received all that because He represented God. Men hate God, and they hated the One who revealed Him. They hate the holiness of God, and they hate the holiness of Christ.

A willingness to please God in spite of the inevitable reproach is a key Christian attitude. Christ was willing to endure anything for the sake of doing the Father's will. He was indifferent to His own deprivation, pain, and agony. His willingness to please the Father is our example. Rather than trying to please ourselves, we should follow Christ's pattern and be willing to suffer anything in pleasing another. He set aside all His divine rights to be subject to the Father and suffer for the sake of sinners. Can we do less for a fellow Christian? First John 2:6 says, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

IV. SUBMISSION TO SCRIPTURE (v. 4)

"Whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope."

We are to seek fulfillment in the Word of God, not from personal pursuits. We ought to conform to what the Word of God teaches.

A. The Value of Scripture

In his justification for using the Old Testament in verse 3, Paul affirms the value of Scripture in general. The phrase "whatever things were written in earlier times" refers to the Old Testament. Second Peter 1:21 says, "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." That verse also refers to the Old Testament. The phrase "was written for our learning" tells us that the Old Testament is not a dead book. First Corinthians 10:6, 11 tell us it provides us with examples. Paul said to Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

B. The Instruction of Scripture

What does Scripture teach us according to Romans 15:4? "That we, through patience [Gk., hupomon[ma]e, "endurance"] and comfort [encouragement] of the Scriptures, might have hope." I believe man needs hope more than anything else. The goal of Scripture is to give us hope for

the future, for eternal life, for forgiveness from sin, and for the meaning of life. In Jeremiah 14:8 God is called "the hope of Israel." He is the giver of hope. The author of Psalm 119 said, "I hope in thy Word" (vv. 81, 114).

Our hope is based on what the Bible reveals. Would you have hope in the life to come if you'd never read Scripture? No. That's why Ephesians 2:12 says that those without the Scriptures were without hope and without God in the world. Without the Word of God we have no basis for hope. We wouldn't know about heaven, about Christ and His Kingdom, or about the glorious reward that lies ahead. Scripture gives us hope, and it is realized through two great spiritual realities: endurance and encouragement.

1. Endurance

Scripture tells us we can endure any trial, difficulty, or anxiety. James 5:78 says, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient, establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth near." Endurance comes from confidence in Scripture. The Bible tells us we have the power to patiently endure this life, waiting for the hope that awaits us. We could not endure our trials if we had no word from God about the security of the believer. If we didn't know we were secure, every time trouble came we might think we were thrown out of God's Kingdom. But Scripture tells us to endure, to be strengthened, and to develop patience so we can be more useful to God and more effective in winning others (James 1:4).

2. Encouragement

The Greek word translated "comfort" in Romans 15:4 is paraklesis. Another form is parakletos--one who comes alongside to encourage. The Word of God not only tells us how to endure, but also encourages us in the process.

We have hope, and that hope is anchored in the Word of God. We need to learn from Scripture. A biblical mindset is the key ingredient for the strong believer's attitude toward a weaker brother. One aspect of learning patience and encouragement is learning to tolerate weaker brothers. Learn to wait for the day you can exercise your freedom before your weaker brother, and let God's Word encourage you while you endure.

V. DEPENDENCE ON DIVINE POWER (v. 5)

"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus."

A. Praying for Strength

Paul realized the strong believer must depend on the power of God because he can't love his weaker brother on his own. If we depend on human resources we'll be impatient and weak. Through prayer we depend on God. The God of endurance and encouragement will allow us to endure deprivations of our liberty and encourage us in the process.

B. Praying for Unity

Paul here prayed that God might lead all believers to be likeminded toward one another. That means to have the same concerns. The attitude of likemindedness reveals a loving concern that brings about unity. Paul is not referring to doctrinal unity. We assume there will be disagreement on minor doctrines. But in spite of that, there should be harmony in relationships. Where there is discord on doctrine regarding neutral things, then the strong need to come alongside the weak and bring unity despite differences of opinion. But only God can produce that ability in the strong believer. That's why the apostles gave themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). What about your prayer life? When did you last pray for the unity of the church? When did you last pray for God to make you one who could sustain the weak?

VI. GLORY TO GOD (vv. 6-7)

We should have a consuming desire for God to be glorified.

A. The Essence of Christ (v. 6)

"That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every time Jesus spoke to God, He addressed Him as Father, except on the cross, where He said, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). He also instructed believers to address God as Father (Matt. 6:9). Paul, in describing God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is proclaiming the deity of Jesus Christ. John 5:17-18 says, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he ... said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." Anytime the Bible refers to God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, it emphasizes that God is one with Christ. Paul emphasized that many times:

1. Ephesians 1:3--"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."
2. Ephesians 1:17--"The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory."
3. 2 Corinthians 1:3--"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ--God and Christ are one. Therefore no man can come to God except by Christ (John 14:6). No one worships God unless he recognizes Him as the Father of Christ (John 5:23).

Paul in Romans 15:6 instructs believers to maintain unity with one mind (internally) and one mouth (externally) for the purpose of glorifying God.

B. The Example of Christ (v. 7)

"Wherefore, receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."

Christ received us when we were vile, lost sinners to glorify God. As Christ thus received us, so we are to receive each other that we might glorify God.

A consideration of others, disregard for self, conformity to Christ, submission to Scripture, dependence on divine power, and a desire to glorify God are essential if we are to manifest, enjoy, and glorify God with unity in the church.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What things violate the unity of the church?
2. What is God's desire for Israel and the church? Explain.
3. Describe the unity displayed by members of the early church in Acts 2:41-46.
4. Explain how unity in the church is reinforced by the Trinity (Eph. 4:3-6).
5. Give some examples of how Scripture emphasizes unity.
6. What does it mean to be considerate of others?
7. What is Paul communicating by his use of the Greek word translated "bear" in Romans 15:1?
8. In what way was Absalom a man pleaser?
9. What criteria should we use for exercising our liberty in Christ?
10. What responsibility do strong believers have toward the weak (Rom. 15:2)?
11. Whom did Christ please? Support your answer with Scripture.
12. What did Christ receive as a result of His example (Ps. 69:9)?
13. How can we follow Christ's example in pleasing others?
14. We should seek fulfillment from the _____ of _____, not from _____ .
15. What is the value of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17)?
16. According to Romans 15:4, what does Scripture teach us? Explain.
17. In what two ways does Scripture give us hope?
18. What happens when believers depend on human resources? What happens when we depend on God's strength?
19. What should be the consuming desire of all believers?
20. How did Paul proclaim the deity of Christ in Romans 15:6?

Pondering the Principles

1. Read the following verses: 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27, 2:2; Colossians 3:14-15; and 1 Peter 3:8-9. Make a list of the things you are responsible to do to help maintain unity in the church. Next to each item, indicate whether you are above average, average, or below average in your practice of maintaining unity. Isolate the one thing you believe you need the most improvement in. Make it your goal this week to improve in that area.

2. According to Romans 15:1-2, the strong believers owe a debt to the weak: to shoulder their burdens and build them up spiritually. The only way to do that is to sacrifice our desires for their sake. Read Philippians 2:1-8. According to verses 1-4, what should our priority be? What can you practically apply from Christ's example in verses 5- 8? How might you treat a weak believer by following Christ's example?

3. Do you pray for the unity of the church? How often? Based on what you have learned about the importance of unity, how often should you be praying? Take this time to pray for the unity of the church as a whole, and in particular for your local congregation. If you know of people who aren't getting along, pray for them. Finally, pray for your specific role in helping to maintain unity. Ask God to give you opportunities to make sacrifices for others so that the church might be more unified.

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