

Be in Unity With One Another  
Romans 15:5-6

One of the most challenging and physically draining and yet most rewarding weeks as a counselor at Barakel was the week dedicated to those with physical and mental disabilities. They came from all ages and abilities. We had some who were blind, some with mental retardation, some with Down syndrome, some with severe cerebral palsy and so on. Some had deformities to the body where limbs didn't grow but minds were as sharp as ever. Some labored at speaking making it difficult to understand them, others labored at walking.

Phyllis was a person who suffered from both. Friday night was testimony time and campers would get up and share something about their week. Many would get up and just simply say "I love Jesus". They really meant it. You could see it in their face, hear it when they sang, which was always off key and a word or two behind the music, but that didn't matter to them. They sang with joyful hearts.

Phyllis had severe cerebral palsy and the day of testimony time her counselor would take her to the camp office where she could use the typewriter to type out her testimony. It would only be a sentence or two long and it would take her a good hour to bang it out and she had to do it, but it expressed her heart.

At game time we would take them down to the ball diamond to play some softball or kickball. With the coordination of a newborn foal trying out its legs for the first time they would swing or kick and run. Many of them had minds telling them one thing and bodies doing something entirely different. They just didn't work together. But it didn't matter to them. You could see the joy on their faces as they gave everything they had. It was an incredible feeling to us counselors. We would help them run the bases or go after the ball. We would push wheelchairs down to first base. One time a

counselor was speeding down the baseline and turned to go to second and he was going so fast the wheelchair tipped over. He and the occupant went sprawling. Both just bust out laughing.

I've always been healthy. My brain tells my body to run or walk or eat and it does. It's never been a problem for me like it was for many of those campers.

Now think for a moment about that and compare it to the church. The Apostle Paul compares the church to a body. It's made up of many members all with a specific and unique purpose to help the rest of the members of the body function properly. Some make up the eye or the ears or the arms or the blood vessels or any other part. You all have a function. Christ serves as the Head of the body telling it (us) what to do, where to move, how to act and think. Are we functioning as a body by working together in unity or is the body doing something entirely different than what the Head wants?

Unity takes work. It's not for the faint of heart. But if we are going to be what God wants us to be, we have to work at it.

Let's turn to Romans 15:5-6 and see what Paul said about unity.

Romans 15:5-6

May the God who inspires men to endure, and gives them a Father's care, give you a mind united towards one another because of your common loyalty to Jesus Christ. And then, as one man, you will sing from the heart the praises of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Phillips)

Notice the two characteristics that imply the effort required to maintain unity and notice where they come from. First note that they come from God. He is not only the source of endurance or the ability to stick to it, as well as that of Fatherly encouragement

He is also the source of unity. This tells me that without God's work in us, unity in the church isn't going to happen.

I think about what it takes to run a marathon – 26 miles, 285 yards. You don't decide last week that you're going to run a marathon next week, especially if you haven't been training. I was in shape when I decided to run a marathon and began building up to that over an 18 week period increasing my distances as I trained. I didn't train to win, I trained to finish. Some get into the race and they start out to fast and have to drop out or they blow out a knee or start to cramp up because they haven't hydrated properly. I wanted every part of my body working together so that didn't happen to me. If it was my only marathon I wanted to finish

Unity takes effort and requires encouragement all along the way.

From our passage today I want us to consider four important principles that will help maintain unity in the church.

Unity comes from being in the Word of God  
 Unity comes from our walk with God  
 Unity results in our work for God  
 Unity results in the worship of God

Before we go any further let's understand what we mean by unity. We need to define it.

The dictionary says that unity is the state of being one or singleness; the quality of being one in spirit or purpose, harmony, or agreement.

In the very beginning when God instituted marriage He described it in terms of unity, or oneness. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." Genesis 2:24

That oneness is in intimacy.  
 That oneness is in purpose as they were to manage God's creation and then bring unified glory to God.

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul described that singularity of purpose by illustrating it through the body. Those who are Christians are part of one body, the body of Christ. He said that just as the body has many parts, they all make up one body, so there are many Christians each with a different role that make up one body.

The Greek word used here in Romans 15 is used 12 times in the book of Acts, 10 times referring to the unique relationship of the Christian community. He uses a compound word meaning to "rush long" and "in unison". There is to be a oneness of purpose as we let the Head, Christ, move us.

One author describes the Greek word to that of an orchestra. There are many different kinds of instruments that provide different tones and pitches but put together brings harmony. Just as the conductor of an orchestra brings unity from the various instruments so "the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ's church."

Let me add to that this thought. Unity does not mean that we all come to the same conclusion about something. In the previous two chapters of Romans Paul encouraged Christians who were strong in their faith to get along with those who were weak in the matters of conscience. Some newer Christians thought you should only eat veggies because meat bought in the market had been offered to idols. Stronger Christians didn't have a problem with it. Being judgmental about a matter of preference is one way to disrupt unity in the church. It could be the color of carpet or paint on the walls, the use of other instruments or no instruments, whether or not to have a coffee shop in the foyer or dance as part of a service. It can even be about who teaches.

I Corinthians 1:10-13

Paul was educated and a great debater.  
 Apollos was a gifted and eloquent orator.  
 Peter was blue collar.  
 Jesus, well, who wouldn't want to follow Him.

Unfortunately there was a lack of unity there. Unity doesn't mean that we agree on everything. Unity means that we can agree to disagree but we do so in a spirit of love by putting aside our preferences for the sake of the oneness.

We can be discussing something in a Board meeting for which we all have a strong opinion even to the point of disagreeing, but when it comes to a vote we put that aside and come to an agreement on what should be done for the benefit of the church.

Unity then is to be of the same mind, to be of one accord, one purpose. Unity is so key to the success of the church Jesus prayed for it, for you, for us to be in unity.

John 17:20-23

Jesus chose 12 men to follow Him, to be His disciples. They were ordinary men, men with no particular leadership skill or teaching ability. In many respects they should remind us of ourselves, flawed, fearful, and at times faithless. It was His task to shape them into a unit that would carry on His work after He was gone. They didn't know it but that event would happen about 3 and a half years after beginning to follow Him.

The Bible records times of strife among the little band. They argued over who was the greatest among them. They each had their reasons.

They ran away when Jesus was arrested.

They all secretly thought someone else should do the menial task of washing feet as they gathered for what would be their last meal together before He was crucified.

There was no cohesiveness to their group. So Jesus prayed for unity among them. They would need it to carry out His work of spreading the gospel and starting the church, but He also prayed that there would be unity among us.

Think for a moment about that and ask yourself what it means to you that Jesus Christ prayed specifically for you, for me, for us, for His church

to be in unity. Then ask yourself what the non-Christian sees when they look at us. Is there unity? Who wants to be part of a group where they don't get along?

I picked up a little book by Thom Rainer titled *I Am A Church Member*. The essence of the book is not about what the congregation can expect from the church but what the church should expect from each person in the congregation. He begins one chapter titled "I Will Be a Unifying Church Member" this way: "God desires for Christians to get along. In fact He is emphatic about it. Jesus was clear when He said: "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

Love is the yeast that permeates the church so that we experience the raising of unity in the church family. How we treat one another will let the world know whether or not we are a Christian. When you become a Christian God has an expectation of you. That expectation is to be a unifier in the church.

Talent will only get you so far in sports. That was quite evident about 20 years ago when UM boasted their fab 5 team – each one was a top recruit from their respective State. There was one problem. As good as they were, they couldn't play well together, there was no unity.

It's the same in the church. If we don't work together, the church can't succeed as it should. Every church member must contribute to the overall unity of the church or we will suffer for it. Ephesians 4:1-3

If you teach, that's important.

If you serve as a Deacon, that's important.

If you work in the nursery, that's important.

If you usher, that's important.

Responsibilities in the church are important for the church to function, but there is a greater duty in the

church and that is to “diligently keep the unity of the Spirit.”

By God’s Spirit working in you, you are the source of unity in the church. As Paul points out in Romans 12 and in our passage today sometimes that means sacrificing our preferences to ensure unity continues in the church.

In Colossians 3:14 Paul writes “Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”

Folks, without love unity isn’t going to happen. A unified church is a powerful thing, it can accomplish much and the devil knows that so he’ll do anything he can to disrupt unity and there is no greater disrupter of unity than gossip. It can bring a church to a screeching halt. It can have such a negative impact on a church or Christian organization and its ministry that one organization has gossip spelled out in its employee handbook. It isn’t tolerated and an employee can even lose his or her job because of it, that’s how destructive gossip is in destroying unity.

If we are to restore and retain unity in the body we must practice forgiveness. Let’s face it, the last time I looked in the mirror, which was about an hour ago, and as I look at each of you we’re all human, we all make mistakes, we all say something or do something whether intentional or not that will hurt feelings, that will be misunderstood, that will chip away at unity. In those instances we must forgive. And that is a topic we’ll discuss more at length in a few weeks.

Thom Rainer ends his chapter on Unity with a pledge to consider and signed by each person in the church. It goes like this: *“I am a church member. I will seek to be a source of unity in my church. I know there are no perfect pastors, staff, or other church members. But neither am I. I will not be a source of gossip or dissension. One of the greatest contributions I can make is to do all I can in God’s*

*power to help keep the church in unity for the sake of the gospel.”*

Maybe that should be something we ask ourselves before we say something to someone, or do something to another person in the body of Christ. How will that affect the testimony of the gospel? I have taken a long time to get to my first point, but I hope you understand and see how important unity is for the church. So what can we do to ensure unity continues in our church?

## I. UNITY COMES FROM BEING IN THE WORD OF GOD

The book of Acts is a great place to see unity exhibited in the early church. Pay particular attention to the importance God’s Word played in their unity. Notice their unity.

Acts 1:14

Acts 2:1, 4

A month earlier they were vying for top spot on the Jesus team. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus changed their tune and transformed them into a unified group. The church would not have gotten off the ground if they continued to be divisive.

Acts 2:42-47

That word “devoted” means loyal, dedicated, and committed. We see both an action and a reaction to the Word of God as they continued to learn from the teaching by Jesus’s disciples. This isn’t an early form of socialism. There was such a commitment to the Word of God it spilled over into church people seeing tangible needs of other church people and doing something about it. Unity doesn’t let someone else in the church fend for themselves. The impact of the Word of God when practiced brings unity in the church.

Every one of us has a responsibility to study God’s Word and do it.

II Timothy 2:15 “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

I Peter 2:2-3 “Like newborn babes, crave (desire) pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

II Peter 3:18 “But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

What are you doing to know God’s Word?

What are you doing with what you know about God’s Word? If we are going to have unity we must be in God’s Word daily.

Unity comes from our walk with God

## II. UNITY COMES FROM OUR WALK WITH GOD

Let’s face it, if we aren’t studying God’s Word we won’t know how to have a godly walk.

Psalm 119:9-11 “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your word. I seek You with all my heart; do not let me stray from Your commands. I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.”

When we let the Word of God permeate our lives and we practice it, the result is a godly walk, having the character of God. That results in unity.

Philippians 1:6 “Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

God isn’t going to leave something He started half done. I have been to a pizza restaurant that will sell pizzas half cooked. They give you the directions to finish baking it at home. Sometimes I’ll pop in a frozen pizza for supper. You bake it for the amount indicated on the package but when you go to take it out the dough is not cooked all the way through in

the center. God’s intent is not to leave you half baked, He will finish in you what He started, which means that when Christ returns for His followers you will be made complete, perfect, finished. At the moment we trust Christ as Savior, God’s Spirit begins to bring about a transformation in our lives that changes our character, changes our desires, changes our perspective. We become a new creation. And as we read and study God’s Word His Spirit will shape us into His image, much as a potter will shape a lump of clay into some design.

There is a jewelry store in the Grand Blanc area that specializes in custom jewelry – one of a kind creations so that no one else can walk out of the store with the exact same piece of jewelry. You are a custom designed piece of art as God shapes you so that your walk is patterned after Him. Every day He continues to work in you and that work will continue until Christ returns.

Philippians 3:20-21 “Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”

I John 3:2-3 “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him, purifies himself even as He is pure.”

That means we have a responsibility in becoming like Christ in character as well. It’s not all left up to God.

Such a transformed life both in attitude and action results in a walk that seeks unity in the church.

Unity comes from our walk with God.

Unity results in our work for God

## III. UNITY RESULTS IN OUR WORK FOR GOD



I don't like ants. I find them in the dishwasher. They get in my marshmallow peeps and Lucky Charms. They get in the dog food. They are disgusting. But if you ever wanted to see one of God's creatures display unity in their work, it's the ant. They form bridges between some incredible spaces and even on water. When a food source is too big for one ant they work together to get it back to the nest. Their work is unity in action. The Bible gives us a good example of what can be accomplished when people work together in unity. Nehemiah 4:1-6

In the KJV the end of verse 6 reads "they had a mind to work." They put their heart into it. They gave it their all. Unity in the church encourages each other to do their best keeping in mind that while we may be working for and with others our work is really to the Lord. Nehemiah 6:15-16

Folks, that's huge. All the people were united and they built the wall in 52 days. The Babylonian army had completely destroyed the wall. It was in total ruin and the Israelites built it in 52 days because they had a mind to work.

Think of what this church could accomplish united in our work, everyone doing what they can. That doesn't mean that everyone does the same thing. It means that we all do what we can, united in the work God has called us to.

There are some projects around the church that need to be done and Rich can't do them all. He needs the church to be united in keeping our building and grounds looking sharp. Let's unite around him and help where we can.

With a growing nursery and Sunday school, there is a need for some additional helpers. We need to be united in our effort to staff and teach little ones. See Kathy.

We have an A/V project we need to get behind and in a unified effort make it happen. It needs to be done because it needs updating and because one of our pieces of equipment is not compliant with the FCC.

According to Hebrews 10:24 we are to encourage good works in the church.

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul writes that we are created to do good works, which God prepared for us to do.

And again in Ephesians 4:12 the church is to be prepared to do works of service in order to build the church up in the faith.

We read in II Timothy 3:16-17 that the Word of God equips us for good works.

I Corinthians 15:58 encourages us that until the Lord returns we are to abound in God's work.

When it comes to doing good works for others Galatians 6:9-10 tells us they should be done for everyone especially for Christians.

Unity results in our work for God.  
Unity results in our worship of God.

#### IV. UNITY RESULTS IN OUR WORSHIP OF GOD

Here is the bottom line as I see. Let's return to our text in Romans 15. We find it in verse 6.

Unity in worship – that is after all, why we were created and God is glorified when there is unity. That word glorify comes from our word for doxology or praise. Unity results in worship as God is glorified.

Psalm 150:6 "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."

When we finally experience the splendor of heaven, one of the things you will notice is the unity of

those gathered as we give God glory.

Isaiah 6:1-3

Revelation 4:1-11

Revelation 5:6-14

Songs seem richer, joy seems more vibrant when there is unity in the body. I hope you can sense it, feel it, and embrace it. There are so many things that can disrupt unity in the church like jealousy, envy, bitterness, and unforgiveness. But where love and humility are shown to one another there will be unity. Stay in the Word of God, walk in the ways of God, do the work of God, results in our unified worship of God. We are called to be in unity.

I am, you are a church member. We are called to do everything we can to bring unity in the church. The world is watching what are they seeing?