

**August 16, 2016**

**Romans 15:5-6, “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.”**

As we have been working our way through the book of Ephesians in our time together on Sunday mornings, there are two things that stand out. First is the importance of being **“in Christ.”** I have mentioned numerous times that this phrase appears in this epistle 27 times. The second thing is that of the unity of the Body of Christ. We are one if we are **“in Christ.”** But one thing that is beginning to become clear as we make our way through the letter the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus is that true unity in the Body is impossible unless we are in Christ.

Years ago, before I was ever a pastor soon after the Lord saved me, we were attending a small church in Kansas which unfortunately was very strife ridden. I had always assumed that if one went to church then one was a Christian, right? What I began to understand as I observed the back-biting, bitterness, anger, and immorality in that little church was that there are many people in churches who are just as lost as the drug addict out on the street.

As Paul is nearing the end of his letter to the church in Rome he has been teaching on the subject of unity in the Body. The church in Rome as with most of the churches in the New Testament had a mix of Jewish believers and Gentile believers. And just as in our church today we have some who are new in the faith and some who are mature believers. So as you can imagine there were no doubt times when unity was a bit of a challenge. There are times in every church when unity is a challenge. Disunity is most often the result of someone putting their own perceived needs ahead of the needs of others.

Paul says here in verse 5 as part of a prayer for their unity, **“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you...”** In the NASB it reads, **“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you...”** There are things that God demands of us and one of those things is unity. But as this verse shows us all things are from God. The ability to meet those demands and to live in love and unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ is only possible when we are in Christ. God grants us the **“endurance and encouragement”** that we need to accomplish this.

Paul then writes, **“to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus.”** Paul is praying that God will grant us, as only He can, the gift of being of one mind in Christ. The apostle is speaking here of the unity of the body on issues of doctrine. Paul is not talking about issues on which Scripture is silent, issues of preference and the like. It is nonessential issues that cause the greatest amount of conflict in churches and they are usually the cause of disunity. Paul then calls on us as believers who will at times hold differing views, to be in loving, spiritual, and brotherly harmony **“with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus.”** But this command is only fulfilled by the power of God. We cannot live “in accord with Christ Jesus” if we are not in Christ Jesus.

In verse 6 Paul says, **“that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** The consummate purpose of Christian unity is not so we will feel good, it is not ultimately for our benefit (although there are most definitely benefits), the ultimate purpose is to please the Lord. We are then to glorify God both individually and corporately, both inwardly and outwardly. It is only when we His people are of **“one voice”** that we really worship the Lord. When there is disunity in the camp of God’s people then He is not glorified.

The real issue often times in a church that is strife ridden is that there is in the church some “tares among the wheat.” There are some in the body who appear to be believers but really they are lost. How can we know this? Because Paul writes that this ability to live in unity is only given from God through His Holy Spirit. So when we are not in unity, when we are quarreling and fighting, when there is anger and disrespect often times it is a result of the fact that there are some in the body who are not really part of the body, who then do not have the Holy Spirit and then cannot act in Christian love and unity.

John wrote in 1 John 3:10, **“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”** Let us who God has graciously saved be **“eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”**