

THE QUEST FOR UNITY IN THE CHURCH

Romans 15:1-13

Introduction: Unity and the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics

I. Does God Really Care about Unity in the Church? (v.6)

- A. Paul's Desire: "That together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.6)
- B. What are some other reasons that unity is important?

II. What Can We Do to Achieve Unity in the Church? (v.1-2)

- A. We are not "to please ourselves" (v.1)
 - o Our first question should not be: "What do I like or prefer?"
 - o Our first question should not be: "What do I have the right to do?"
 - ** Key point: Unity is not achieved by putting the focus on ourselves!
- B. Instead, "Let each of us please our neighbor" (v.2)
 - o "bear with the failings of the weak" (v.1)
 - "bear with" does not simply mean tolerate, but to sympathize and enter into their concerns
 - Also means we refrain from activity that causes our sister to stumble
 - o "build him up" (v.2)
 - This goes beyond merely tolerating our sister, but looking for ways to encourage and edify her
 - What are ways that we can build a person up?
 - ** Key point: focusing on doing good to those you disagree with is the key to unity

III. What Empowers/Motivates Us Toward This Unity? (v.3-13)

- A. The Example of Christ

- o "Christ did not please himself" (v.3)
 - Christ did not defend his own rights or seek his own pleasure
 - Paul quotes Ps 69:9 to show how he endured reproach
 - o "Christ has welcomed you"! (v.7)
 - Christ exemplified Paul's point by enduring our own weaknesses and failings
 - Why does seeing our own weaknesses and failings help us seek unity?
 - o Christ has broken barrier between Jews and Gentiles by bringing them both into the church (v.8-13)
 - Christ's work is perfect example of how to bring unity between two opposing groups!
 - Paul then proves Christ's mission of unity from the Scriptures
- B. The Teachings of Scripture (v.4)
- o The Bible provides "instruction" and "encouragement" for those who have given up their rights and are looking to please others
 - o How does the Bible encourage us in the midst of our giving up our lives for others?
- **Key question: Are you looking to God's Word as the guide for your pursuit of unity?
- C. The Power of God (v.5)
- o The endurance needed to live in unity is something God must "grant" to you (v.5)
 - In other words, you don't have the strength in yourself to really pursue unity!
 - o The key to getting this power is turning to God and asking for it
 - Paul's statement is a prayer of sorts: "May the God of endurance...grant you"

Discussion Groups

1. How has this study helped you see the importance of unity in the body of Christ?

2. Do you find yourself defending your “rights” in the body of Christ, rather than giving them up for others? How does this study help you give them up more readily?

3. How does the parable of the unmerciful servant help you deal more patiently with others? How do the sufferings of Christ help you deal more patiently with others?
