

One heart and one mouth for Jesus

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[0 : 00] Amen. Let's turn then to Romans chapter 15, the passage that was read to us. And we'll pray. Lord in heaven, please may we know the inspiration and the endurance and the! and the encouragement of the scriptures from God himself as we turn to the teaching of your word. So please be among us and please speak to us to advance your kingdom and your purposes amongst us and in this world. For Jesus' sake, amen.

Well we're going to look at Romans 15, 1 to 13. This is following on from all the other chapters that we've looked at. It seems to me that Paul is beginning to draw his argument to a conclusion and pick up various threads and bring them all together. So it is, there are a few threads, it's not so easy to, he's not just pursuing one particular thought but bringing a number of threads together and you perhaps notice that that's how it's working a little bit. Let's turn the light up. It's not so good is it? And I think he's talking about God's vision for the gospel age which is united cross-cultural functioning churches. That's the vision that he's promoting, cross-cultural functioning churches. Think of the news if you looked at the BBC. You would find in various parts of the world that different cultures are not functioning together. So I don't know whether it's top of the news today but in Ukraine it certainly has been top of the news of one country with the different ethnic sympathies in confrontation and in very unpleasant confrontation. If you went to Syria you would find again internal division and civil war of a most horrible and unrelenting sort.

And if you looked at the commentary on the UK voting you would find UKIP type feelings expressed in which one ethnic group says for various reasons I am not comfortable with another ethnic group.

[2 : 52] Nigel Farage said he wouldn't be comfortable with people from another ethnic group living next to him and whether he said that as he really meant it or not I'm just pointing out there are feelings like that in our country. So in the world you don't have cross-cultural functioning communities. You have not always but certainly you do find tension, division, enmity between different cultures and races and classes and groups. It characterises the world, the fallen world that we live in.

But the vision of the Bible is the opposite of that. The vision of the Bible is of different people, they are different colours, you've got green people and red people and black people, all different colours singing together and praising God together. And for Paul he's thinking particularly about the great division between the Jew and the Gentile. When it says Gentile it simply means the nations. So all the different nations, the non-Jewish races. And he, the vision that he is calling on in these verses is that these people unite together in praise to Israel's God through Messiah Jesus. And he says it in verse 6.

He says, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So you're not fighting with one another, you're not putting bombs under one another, but together with one heart and mouth you are glorifying the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he says it in verse 7. Accept one another in order to bring glory to God, in order to bring praise to God, NIV says. And it's there in verse 9.

[5 : 09] So that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy as it is written, therefore I, it's a Jewish writer, I a Jewish writer, will praise you among the Gentiles.

I will swallow, I will sing songs to your name. So again it's Jew and Gentile united together in praise to God.

And then verse 10 says the same thing. Rejoice O nations with his people. So it's a united praise. And verse 11. Praise the Lord all you Gentiles. Sing praises to him all you peoples.

So an international vision. And in verse 12 you have the same thing yet again. And again he says and again and again and again and again.

And again verse 12 Isaiah says the root of Jesse will spring up. This is the Jewish Messiah who will arise to rule over the non-Jewish nations.

[6 : 14] And the nations, the Gentiles, will hope in him. And I would suggest a quite wide meaning for the idea of hope as a common basis, a common purpose.

And this is the Gentiles gathered together to glorify God, to praise God, to make him their purpose and make him their trust.

And he picks that up again. May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace as you trust in him that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. So this is Paul's vision of a cross-cultural combined functioning community.

Or I suppose he's particularly thinking of one of these communities, the Roman church, church in Rome. And that's what he is so passionate about in these verses.

That's the one thing he's driving towards. And I, it, yeah, preachers can easily say, but he doesn't mean this. And sometimes they slide things in which are not completely fair.

[7 : 28] But I think it is fair to say he doesn't have a vision for spiritual hermits. He doesn't have a vision for one Christian over there and one Christian over there and one Christian over there.

And they never really get together in any shape or form. He doesn't have a vision for spiritual hermits. He has a vision for the community of Jesus Christ. And he doesn't have a vision for separate ethnic churches.

So he, I don't think he would be at all happy if in Rome they said, well, come on, Paul, the simplest way is if we Jews meet in one church and the Gentiles meet in another church. And then we won't have any conflict.

He really would be unhappy about that. He really wants to see the result of the gospel to be this combination of ethnic groups, in particular the people who worship the God of Israel and the nations.

He wants them worshipping together. And I think this puts a bit of a question mark over the church growth principle of the homogeneous unit.

[8 : 35] I think Tim Keller has words to say about this and I can't actually remember what he says. But it's, the principle is that churches go best if you get the middle class people in one church and the working class people in another church and the Eastern European people in one church and the African people in another church.

Because that's the way it just works better that way. That's the homogeneous unit principle. And I think Paul would be deeply uncomfortable with that. I think he would say, well, that's not what I was aiming for.

I'm aiming to try and get everybody in the same church. Now I know that not all ethnic groups live in the same place. And I know that there may be pragmatic reasons why you need to have several different churches in a locality.

But his aim is to get the people of God worshipping together. And I put there, I think that's a repetition of the individualism.

He's not aiming for a little group here and a little group there that, you know, just one or two Christians. He's aiming to build a community.

[9 : 50] That's what he's aiming. And that's what we're going to look at this morning. How do we get to this point? How do we get to the point that Paul is aiming for?

That with one heart and one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Well, I've got a couple of answers to this. And the first answer is how do you get to this point in Romans 15?

Well, you go through Romans chapters 1 to 14 to get there. And I'm going to call off at a few important points that Paul has already made.

And I'm going to say that you get there via the gospel. You don't get there by short-circuiting the gospel. The gospel is the message of the gospel is the thing that achieves this.

So I've picked out a few points. He will have already told us and they would have already agreed. Romans 3, 23, which says, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[10 : 53] And that's agreed. That's part of the way we get to the community. The community is not composed of people who say, It's not our fault.

We're a lot better than some other people. It's not made of people who think that way. It's made of people who say, God have mercy on me, a sinner.

I've sinned. I'm not blaming my parents. I'm not blaming society. I'm saying it with me. And if you haven't got to that point yourself, then you're not going to be part of this community in the way that it's supposed to be.

There is the confession of sin. There is realizing that God is God, which is the point that he's made in the first chapter or so. The problem with the nations is that although they know God, they don't glorify him as God or give thanks to him, but their thinking becomes futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

They won't let God be God. They say, I'm God. I won't let God be God. I won't let him rule everything. I won't let him be the be-all and end-all. I won't let him be the Lord.

[12:08] God. And you can't get to Romans 15 without going past this, that God is God. And if you're sitting thinking, well, God may be God, but I'm not taking much notice of him, then you haven't realized that God is God.

If you're sitting thinking, well, the main thing in life is me and what I want, rather than thinking the main thing in life is God and what he wants, you haven't realized that God is God.

And we also need to come through this point of the redeeming achievement of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. How do I draw near to the God who is gloriously God when I have so miserably failed to honor him as he deserves to be honored, when I've sinned?

How can I approach this God? Well, Romans 3, 24, 25 will have told us that all have sinned and all are justified through grace, through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.

And the people who are in Romans 15 will have a clear idea that the thing that stands between them and lostness is simply Jesus Christ dying on the cross.

[13:29] And they're saying, that's what I owe it all to. I owe it all to the redeeming achievement of Jesus Christ dying on the cross.

It's through him and only through him. And I'm so grateful to him and I'm leaning my weight upon him because he is my redeemer. And he will also have agreed with his readers, for example, chapter 3, verse 26, that this redemption is received by faith.

He says, God puts right those who have faith in Jesus. So these are people who are not saying, well, I'm working my way to God. I'm trying hard to be good.

My good deeds probably outweigh my bad deeds. He's not talking or thinking along those lines at all. These people are people who've got, I am trusting in what Jesus has done and in nothing else. I'm not looking to anything else. I'm not drawing comfort from how well I've done or anything like that or a good person I am or my privileges or my background. It's Jesus Christ and what he's done.

[14:41] That's where I'm pinning my hope and I'm trusting in him. And so my first answer, how do we get to the community? We get to the gospel, through the gospel.

I could say more on that, but I briefly pointed out some of the main features of the gospel. And people who receive this message find that it is a revolutionary message.

It changes one's whole attitude to oneself it changes one's whole attitude to God it changes one's whole attitude to life and it changes one's whole attitude to other people.

And you can't get the sort of community that Paul is looking for until people have experienced that revolutionary change. Number one then, that's how we get there, by the gospel.

Number two, how do we get there? By adoption of the new attitudes that the gospel brings. And so I'm going to quote us now from Romans 15 itself.

[15:51] I did find a lot of these things are intertwined, so I'm trying to pick out some threads with more or less success. But here's one of the threads that's in there. Romans 15 verse 1, we who are strong ought to bear with the weaknesses of the unable or the non-powerful.

This is off the back of what he was saying before, the potential attitudes of Jew and Gentile to one another, the people who felt that they could, they got the hang of it and they weren't constrained by some of the Jewish scruples and laws that the other people felt that they were bound by.

And Paul says, well, I feel that I'm free of those things too. I'm strong like you guys, but the strong amongst us need to bear with the failings of the weak.

We need to bear with the shortcomings or the weaknesses that these other members of our congregation have. Bear with, not in a sort of resentful way, they're so stupid, can't understand why they don't get the point, but in a willing, cheerful, compassionate way, this attitude, he says, is so important in the church.

And of course, the attitude is important in the church. It's essential that we bear with one another.

[17 : 32] Now, you might find there are people in the church who put the knives and forks back in the wrong drawer in the kitchen, and we have to be patient with the failings of those who are weak, et cetera.

very important Christian attitude. And then he says a similar thing, we should not please ourselves, but we should please our neighbor for his or her good to build, for edification, to build him or her up. The pleasing bit is not saying that we try and just ingratiate ourselves with everybody and say things that they'll agree with rather than agreeing with God.

But rather, the pleasing is almost like serving. Each of us should serve his neighbor. And when he says neighbor, it reminds us of that great command to love our neighbor, doesn't it?

Each of us should serve our neighbor, let's put it that way, for their good, for building him or her up. Now let me just say, Paul does speak quite robustly, and he says that a bit later on.

[18 : 58] Please don't interpret that I am saying this morning that I am accusing the church here of every failure that could be conceived from Romans 14 and 15.

I'm not trying to scold us, but I am trying to present the incentives that he gives to us here. He says, this is the way to go. This is what we should be doing to serve one another, to serve our neighbor for his or her good, for building up.

So we have a picture of what people are thinking in the community of the church. And in the community of church, we're not thinking me, me, me, me.

That's not the mindset that he wants us to have. On the contrary, he wants the group to be thinking of each of the members.

How can I serve him or her? What can I say or do that would be for the best good of this person or that person or that person?

[20 : 07] How can I build them up? Are they sad? How can I say something positive to them? Are they lonely?

How can I befriend them? Are they feeling out of place? How can I welcome them? How can I serve this person? How can I show them that I value them?

How can I greet them? How can I sympathize with them? How can I pray for them? This is the mindset that he says he wants people to have.

Each of us should serve his neighbor for his or her good to build him or her up. And he ties this up with some incentives which we'll now come and look at.

And in trying to pick these threads out I would like or these entwined threads I would like to pick up just three things from the passage. The example of Christ, the impact of scripture and the praise of God.

[21 : 22] the example of Christ, number one. Powerful incentive to living as the community that Christ wants.

He says in verse three, for even Christ did not please himself. Christ did not serve himself. but the quote says as it is written the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

What we could say was that Jesus himself suffered loss and setback for God. He's actually quoting Psalm 69.

You might care to flip back in your Bible to Psalm 69 because Psalm 69 says an awful lot of things. it is a Psalm of David and there are many strands to David being David.

One of the strands is his victory and his kingship but this particular strand in Psalm 69 certainly most of it is to do with suffering and there are some well known verses there.

[22 : 49] So in verse 9 for example zeal for your house consumes me which is quoted in John's Gospel chapter 2 in connection with the destruction of the temple.

They afterwards remembered zeal for your house consumes me. It's something that David wrote that Jesus fulfills. And then the next verse says the insults of those who insult you that's who insult God fall on me.

And verse 21 which you may find some bells ringing verse 21 they put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

Can you think of anybody in the Bible who was given vinegar to drink? Jesus on the cross. It ends up triumphantly verse 35 God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah.

It looks forward to the triumph of the kingdom but what it goes through is the suffering of the kingdom.! Are you serving somebody else so they are being enriched and benefited?

[24 : 34] Do you see the sort of point he's making? And if I can refer you to another place in the Bible Philippians chapter 2 it's a similar point it's not exactly the same but it's a very similar point to the one that Paul makes in Philippians 2 about Jesus Christ and his attitude his mindset his example in verse 8 it says that he humbled himself and he became obedient to death even death on a cross and that's what he did for us and in verse 5 just working backwards Paul says your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus your mind your thinking and in verse 3 he says this means that you're not going to do selfish stuff you're not going to do things basically for selfishness or vain conceit but in humility you're going to think about other people more than yourself and in verse 4 it says each of you should look not only to your own interests but also the interests of others this is the sort of community he's seeking to build based on the example of Jesus Christ and interestingly in Philippians 2 verse 20 he gives us a real life example of somebody like this whose name is Timothy and he says I have no one else like him who takes a genuine interest in your welfare for everyone else looks out for his own interests not those of Jesus Christ and what he does say is to find people who excel in this is actually comparatively! the rare and precious quality to be selfless and Timothy was one of those wonderfully selfless people so number one the example of Jesus Christ something for us to take on board in our relationships number two the impact of scripture so let's go back to Romans 15 and one of the notable things is the way he draws on scripture so he says in verse four everything that was written in the past was written to teach us and he's quoting so he's quoted verse three about Jesus and then he says that's scripture and actually everything in the scriptures everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through the endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope so it was written to teach us and it was written to impart endurance now

I'm thinking about this word endurance does it say endurance I suppose yeah I think what he's saying is that the scriptures have this characteristic of constancy and this characteristic of faithfulness and this characteristic of security and scripture is a source of stability in the Christian life that through this we're stabilized and then he says that the scriptures give encouragement the scriptures urge us and the scriptures motivate us and the scriptures move us on and up they elevate us the scriptures I put energizing they have this quality so that we may have hope and as I said before the hope is something that he keeps on coming back to there in verse 4 hope and it's there in verse 12 the Gentiles will hope in him it's there in verse 13 to be filled with hope and I think the way that he's using it here is not simply a long distant hope for the distant future in glory but he seems to be using it to say something about purpose and trust now sort of a stability and a purpose that moves us forward so I'm saying number two here the impact of scripture and perhaps we could apply this how important it is that we receive bible teaching that's what he says the bible teaches us so that we can appreciate this stability and this energizing it's an important thing for Christians to be taught the scriptures and that's what we try and do here in the church and it's something I believe God has blessed but Paul himself is saying this is an important thing and a second application how important it is for Christians to have scripture as one of life's realities for them so what are the realities of your life well getting up in the morning brushing your teeth going and getting food going to work perhaps the daily reality of the commute well whatever the daily realities are but one of those realities ought to be the input of scripture into my life I can do this in a number of ways the bible isn't particularly specific about it certainly the teaching in the church community maybe you read the bible in the morning it's an excellent thing to be doing maybe as you have your meal you read the bible together maybe you read the bible in the evening maybe you read it at lunch time etc etc but for the

[30 : 26] Christian scripture should be one of life's daily realities because it's through this through the endurance and that it has and the encouragement we have hope and purpose so the impact of scripture and may I add that he says something rather remarkable he said that the scriptures have the characteristic of endurance and encouragement verse 4 and then he says may the God of endurance and encouragement give you one spirit as you follow Christ Jesus that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that God himself has the same quality endurance and encouragement and I'm deducing from this and I don't think I'm far wrong that when scripture is present God is present how does

God touch our lives through scripture how does God express himself and change people and situations through his word when scripture is present in that active sense God is present because

endurance and encouragement are from God himself so that was secondly the impact of scripture how do we achieve this in the community through the impact of scripture how do we achieve this in community number three through the purposes of God and I'm trying to draw this particular strand out he has quoted the scriptures again and again and again and again and again and again doesn't he though verse four is about the Hebrew scriptures and the purposes of God and verse nine he refers to the purposes of God in scripture and verse 10 he says and again the purposes of God in scripture and verse 11 and again and verse 12 and again so I'm trying to pick up this particular thread he's saying think of what's actually happening as you guys in Rome greet one another Jew and Gentile as you sit together as you work together and as you sing praise to God together what's happening God's purposes down through the thousands of years are being fulfilled in whatever it is that room you hire in Rome or that hall that you gather in wherever you're gathering or even as you gather in Brighton the purposes of God are being fulfilled so let's just see something of these purposes he says it in verse 8 I tell you Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy as it is written well let me quote you something about the promises to the patriarchs promises to the father so I'm going right back into Genesis chapter 12 right back to when God's purposes begin their trajectory and begin to be revealed I'm going to read Genesis 12 1 to 3 where God said to Abraham leave your country your people your father's household go to the land I will show you I will make you a great nation I will bless you I will make your name great you will be a blessing I will bless those who bless you whoever curses you I will curse and all the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you and there's this promise made way way back God saying in the future I'm going to bless internationally I'm going to bless your nation Abraham and through you all the nations and Paul says when you guys get together in Rome when you're all singing from the same song book as it were the purposes that were announced to Abraham are being fulfilled in Rome isn't that a grand thing the purposes of God fulfilled and it's fulfilled through his servant Jesus Christ and you see he's quite carefully trying to balance together the privilege of the Jew and the mercy shown to the Gentile so that neither of them look down on one another but both realize their value in God's mercy and then let's move on to the next verse as it is written therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles I will sing hymns to your name well he's quoting this one from Psalm 18 verse 49 and Psalm 18 let me look it up you're welcome to look it up if you're quick this is the great psalm of David looking over his kingdom and what [35 : 59] God has done through him and in verse 49 he says therefore I will praise you among the nations O Lord and Paul's saying that was what David looked forward to and there he was serving God and God blessed him and used him and he was looking forward to something he was looking forward to the kingdom of David and all the nations taking their place in that and you guys there in Rome you're sitting next to Mr.

Abramovich and you're sitting next to Tertullius or whatever and I'm so pleased that you're sitting next to each other and praising God because the purposes of the kingdom of David are being fulfilled and the purposes of God as announced to Moses are being fulfilled too because I think that's where his next quote comes from if I can just catch up with myself this is verse I didn't write it down did I think this is verse 11 which is a quotation from Deuteronomy! 32 43 how silly of me not to write it down is that right yeah this is it's verse 10 isn't it Deuteronomy 32 verse 43 Deuteronomy 32 verse 43 actually if you look it up it doesn't say that does it or does it yes it does what am I looking at rejoice so nations with his people yeah that's right and it he also quotes from Psalm 117 praise the Lord all you nations and he also quotes from Isaiah 11 10 yeah this is the one that isn't quite what it says in the NIV so I'm going now to Isaiah 11 10 in which the prophets see the purposes of God in that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples the nations will rally to him and his place of rest will be glorious well that's what the NIV says the Hebrew says something like the nations will inquire of him and the Greek translation that Paul is working from says the nations will put their hope in him so I sort of think that what he means is in there somewhere that the purposes of God are that David the son of David the root of Jesse will spring up and he will rule over the nations and all the nations will rally to him they will inquire of him and the nations will put their hope in him and he says here is the third motivation then that as you sit together as you're doing as we're doing this morning all the different nations that the purposes of

God to Abraham and David and the prophets are being fulfilled and isn't that a good reason to do the things that he's been telling us to do so to conclude Paul exhorts us he says think of the example of Jesus Christ think of the impact of scripture think of the purposes of God these are reasons to be a gospel church exhibiting these attitudes of accepting!

[40 : 02] those that God has accepted bearing with one another not just thinking of me not thinking selfishly but doing all these other things instead belonging being there for example getting involved and caring for people learning together serving one another bringing glory to God as we praise his name telling the gospel together thinking together having a mind together let's sing