

Family Harmony for Father's Glory

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- [0 : 0 0] Now, let's turn as we seek God's help and blessing to the passage we read in Romans chapter 15. And for a short time, we're looking at verses 5 to 7.
- We can read from verse 4, but we'll mainly look at verses 5 to 7. Romans 15 at verse 4, For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we may have hope.
- 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.
- Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. It's an impressive sight and experience to see and hear a full orchestra playing a famous piece of music, a classic symphony or something like that.
- Because what you find there always fills one with wonder, surely. Because you have all of these different instruments played by different people with the skill to play each of these instruments.
- [1 : 1 9] You have on the musical score different notes, many different notes, different times at which each instrument is played. And all of that comes together in harmony.
- And when you think of everything that goes towards the performance of that sort of piece of music, it is a source of wonder that you hear this coming across with such a wonderful harmony and with such emphasis.
- In other words, although you've got all of these different people playing different instruments and different notes and different times at which they come in with their own contribution to the overall piece of music, they all have one mind.
- They are all under one mind to perform that piece of music and make their own contribution towards the performance of it. That's what gives it the harmony, that they are of one mind in doing what they do towards the final harmonious production.
- And that's something like what Paul is saying in his letters in regard to the church. In regard to the people of God, they are, as he commonly puts it, like a body, like a human body, with all the different parts of it functioning in different ways towards the working of the whole.
- [2 : 4 7] Or you could say, following the analogy of what I've said regarding the orchestra and the symphony, performing it, they are to be of one mind as they set out in their own way to contribute to the overall well-being of the church and the advance of the gospel.
- That is how we are to look at it. And in fact, it helps us really to understand something of these verses when we try and picture it like that. Paul is actually saying here that in the form of, it's not quite a prayer, but it's pretty much the same as a prayer, where he's saying here, that may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another.
- In other words, we're here today as a congregation of different types of people with different gifts, with a variety of things that we contribute to the overall good of the congregation and to the gospel.

We are also here today to witness the ordination and appointment of new office bearers. You have the different ways in which these roles function in the congregation, along with those who don't have offers and yet who are valuable in all the contributions that they make to the well-being and the life of the congregation.

And so, the Lord today is addressing us all through these words, and this is our prayer too as we come to this significant moment in the life of the congregation, that God will grant us the God of endurance and encouragement grant us to live in such harmony with one another, that together we may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore that we are to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us for the glory of God.

[4 : 40] Three things in relation to that. The objective that the apostle has in these verses is found in the words of verse 6.

Together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's his main emphasis. Everything else is around that.

That's his priority. That's his main emphasis. That's his objective. And that's the objective of the harmony that he's speaking about. The way towards that objective is to live in harmony, to have that harmony that he mentions in verse 5 from the God of endurance and encouragement that he will grant us to live in such harmony that we may indeed have that objective reached.

Then there is the implication of that, or you could say the performance of, that harmony in the final verse, verse 7, that we are therefore to welcome one another as we have been welcomed by Jesus Christ.

Now notice, first of all, what we can call the source of our harmony. Because there's a tendency to think that we can produce that harmony ourselves.

[5 : 55] That we can produce like-mindedness and harmony without reference to God. As if we're acknowledging the presence of God, and yet as if he's left it to us to actually produce or create that harmony.

Now that, of course, is not the case. What you read here is, may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you, may he enable you, to live in such harmony as will achieve this objective.

You find similarly in his letter to the Ephesians, where the apostle is there in chapter 3, talking about the unity, and the unity of the Spirit, and where he refers to it as the unity of the Spirit, which we have to maintain.

In other words, the unity and the harmony that God's people enjoy is granted by God. It's a blessing of God. It has its source in God. And we are charged then to look after it, to maintain it, to do nothing that will interfere with it or spoil it.

But it's important to recognize that the source of that harmony of our unity as a people lies with God himself. That's why we are to pray about it and pray again about it and keep praying about it.

[7 : 08] Because it's something that God grants. And it's something because it's God that grants it, we are to make it a specific matter of our continued prayers.

Now notice how God is referred to. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony. It's similar to the verse, to what you have in verse 4.

In fact, it's the same words, endurance endurance and encouragement. And then in verse 5, endurance and encouragement as it describes God. Now when God gives himself these names, that's significant when you read about God being, for example, the God of peace, as you'll find that in Philippians 4 or Hebrews 13.

It's with reference to what else is in those passages. And it's in reference to God being the source of our peace, being the creator of peace for us, as it is here, God being the source of such harmony as to enable us to live in harmony with one another.

He is himself the source, but he's the source of it as the God of encouragement or endurance. And endurance, really, there means forbearance or patience.

[8 : 29] We'll come to that in a minute when we look at the objective of our harmony, but this is what characterizes God in the context. That's why he's referred to us the God of forbearance or endurance and encouragement because these are the things we need and he is the God who provides them and as he provides them for us, he is known as the God of endurance and encouragement in respect.

In other words, one of the things you can take from that is that we recognize God through the grace that he gives us. When he gives us his peace, we recognize him as the God of peace.

When we have his direction or guidance, he is the God who directs. When we have his comfort, he is the God of comfort as Paul again says in 2 Corinthians, the father of comforts and he's here the God of endurance and encouragement.

But you notice the same words in verse 4 that they're actually used with regard to the Scriptures. That too is very important for us. God does not give us the endurance and the encouragement and the peace and the comfort that we seek and that we need apart from the Scriptures.

There are people in the world who actually look for this as an experience but actually don't confine God himself speaking to us through the Scriptures.

[10 : 06] Now, that doesn't mean that the Spirit of God does not take things and actually reveal them to us but it's always through the Scriptures. That's the revelation of God that he's given us. And whatever spectacular experiences people may claim apart from the Scripture or separate from the Scriptures, well, you can actually call that into question or at least disagree with it because it's through the Scriptures that we receive this encouragement and endurance.

That's through the encouragement and endurance of the Scriptures that are actually conveyed by the Scriptures. So, the God is the source of it. In fact, it's God the Father particularly that's mentioned in the context.

He's the source of this forbearance, this patience as he is of peace and of comfort. That's where it comes from. And he brings it to us through his Spirit and through the Scriptures.

That's his method. That's what he has himself set up. That's what he has ordained. That's what he has revealed to us. And today we come in dependence on God through the Scriptures and by the Holy Spirit to seek his encouragement, to seek that forbearance on our own part that would help us to be in harmony with one another.

Now then, the second thing we'll look at is the objective of our harmony. There's the source of it. It comes from the God of endurance and encouragement. But the objective is to glorify God with one voice.

[11 : 46] But to that end, we actually need to live in harmony with one another. Now that literally means, the word that's used there literally means to be like-minded.

He's really saying, may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to be like-minded with one another. And that really shows the importance of the mind being applied and used in this harmony.

It's not something that just is an emotional thing. It does just float around in your soul. It's not something of that kind even though your emotions are very much part of what's involved. But it's primarily an issue of the mind that you be like-minded.

That's where our harmony begins. That's where our unity begins as far as we're concerned. It involves our mind. And Paul, more than anyone else in the New Testament, really refers to the mind so much.

Let this mind be in you. That was also in Christ Jesus. In Philippians chapter 2, as you know, that's actually a passage dealing very much with the same sort of issues as you find here on the call to be living in harmony.

[12 : 54] And the context here is the strong and the weak. Now, we're not going to have time to go into that, but that's the context that he's speaking of from chapter 14 onwards. Some people are of the view that certain types of food should be avoided.

Others are saying, no, no, that's just being far too picky. You can take more than that. They can take other foods as well. Others are being picky about observing certain days and so on, special days.

And what Paul is saying is these are peripheral issues. These are things on the periphery of the fellowship of God's people. You have to be united in the essentials of the gospel.

And being united in the essentials of the gospel means be like-minded. Have that same mind, that oneness of mind that the members of an orchestra have as they're playing that piece of music, all the different contributions that go towards that, but it's one mind.

They're all seeking the same objective, and we're seeking the same objective in glorifying our Father, glorifying God, and to that end, and to achieve that objective, well, he's saying here that we have to live in a like-minded way.

[14 : 11] In other words, the weak, those who are objecting to or insisting that they shouldn't eat certain meats and so on, certain types of food, Paul is appealing to them here that they would actually consider the position of those who don't have these scruples, but at the same time, he's saying to those who are stronger in their faith or in their mind to actually have, that they have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak.

Now, that doesn't mean just put up with them. It means to live in harmony and it means to actually deal with the issue in a harmonious way. And so that's how it is for every congregation, for all the different gifts and for all the different places that are given to people in office or out of office as elders, deacons, communicants, those who are not communicants but frequent attenders.

They have all to come together with a oneness of mind to contribute to the well-being of the congregation, to the advance of the gospel, to the glorifying of God.

And that's why we need the encouragement and the forbearance because dealing with all the different scruples and gifts that we have, we all have scruples, we all have preferences, we all have opinions about certain things.

It needs forbearance, it needs patience, it needs tact, it needs all of these things by which we live in harmony with each other. And Paul's concern here is to preserve and to maintain the unity of the church.

[15 : 48] And that's what these men are going to be vowing to do, that they will not actually, in one of the questions, the questions that are being put to them, is that they will not actually follow any device of courses, that they will not interrupt the harmony of the church, that they will actually be committed with oneness of mind to live in a like-minded way in harmony with one another and with the rest of the congregation.

There's a lot more, of course, that can be said to that. I don't want to take too long today because obviously we've got the ordinations themselves following. But you notice that he says here, in accord with Christ Jesus.

In accord with Christ Jesus. Live in harmony, be like-minded, in accord with Christ Jesus. And that really has two sides to it. Commentators are divided here as to whether this means following the example of Christ, or on the other hand, it could be subject to the will of Christ.

And there's no reason why you can't really think of both aspects of being in accord with Christ because Christ obviously is an example to us, and probably that's the main emphasis in the passage because that's really what's dealt with in verse 3, for example, there, where Jesus did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.

And then you go to verse 8, for I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised. In other words, you've got an emphasis there on Christ not insisting, if you like, on what you could call his own rights as the Son of God as he came into this world and took out human nature and lived in that incarnate state as a servant.

[17 : 34] In Philippians 2, the language is that Christ himself made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant.

He didn't insist, saying something like, well, I am God as he was and as he is, and I can't be expected to actually take the role of a servant.

That's what he did. And we have to live in such harmony and in such accord with Christ, that just as Christ was in accord with God the Father, God the Father who sent him into the world to be the servant that he became.

And just as he was in this world, living as the servant of the Father, answerable to the Father, praying to the Father, all of what's involved in that as the Gospels show us.

So you find that the servant and the Father, the Godhead, in that remarkable expression and revelation and activity, you find Jesus the servant and God the Father who sent him in total accord with one another.

[18 : 50] And what he's saying is, that's your example. That's what set the pattern for congregational life. Live in such harmony. Be like-minded in accord with Christ Jesus.

I mentioned Philippians 2 where you have a very similar passage and very similar words. You can just read it briefly. It's familiar to you anyway, I'm sure, where you find the Apostle Paul they're dealing with an issue such as living in harmony where he says, complete my joy that being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind, you do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interests of others. have this mind among yourselves or let this mind be in you which is yours in Christ Jesus or you could translate which was also or is also in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God thought and did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped or held on to but made himself nothing taking the form of a servant and so on.

Very similar passage and very similar emphasis on Christ and here he's saying in Romans in accord with Christ Jesus but of course when you do that you're actually saying that Christ is our Lord as well as our example and following his example as the pattern for living in accord with his example he's also our Lord and therefore his will is what is very much to the fore and in other words it means that we live not simply with a harmony patterned upon Jesus but also we live to please him we live to meet the terms of his will his sovereign will as the Lord of the church and so both are important in accord with Christ Jesus following his example and also looking to him and his will as to how we should please him and then he says with one mind you together may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ now the one voice they would seem to emphasize worship though maybe not confined to that and that as we come together in worship we are to worship seeking to live like-minded in worship that we are to be like-minded in how we express our thanks to God our dependence on God as we come together that we do so with one voice that doesn't mean just the singing it means the attitude it means the receiving of scripture it means the concern for one another it means the support of one another it means all of that as we seek to live in harmony with one another and thereby come to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ so there's the source of our harmony in God the Father the objective of our harmony is glorifying our Father and the way to it is living in a like-minded way in accord with Christ Jesus and therefore with one voice that we glorify this God and Father of our Lord

[22 : 28] Jesus Christ and then thirdly the performance of our harmony as we welcome one another in other words you could say that's the implication which is set out in the word therefore the beginning of verse 7 therefore he's really saying since this is the case then proceed in this way therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God accepting one another's existence is not nearly enough we are to receive one another a word translated here with the word welcome and Paul in Philippians 2 as we read makes a very similar point we're not just to live in a way that thinks of ourselves as equal with others we are as Christians in Christ of course that is the case but when you think of all the different gifts and all the different ways in which we contribute to the overall fellowship of the church that the church is and the work of the church and the concern we have for the advance of the gospel well he's saying it's not just a matter of accepting one another's existence and accepting that such other people as differ from us belong to the congregation as well that's not welcoming and that's not welcoming as Christ has welcomed us a welcome is something in which you receive somebody gladly in which you treat them as Paul says in Philippians 2 not just as as good as yourself but considering others better than yourself above yourself more important than yourself that's harmony that's what contributes to the harmony that is speaking of here that's the implication of living in harmony living in a like-minded way therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you we'll be seeing shortly those who are going to be newly ordained and admitted to office as deacons and as elders receiving what we call the right hand of fellowship from the existing kirk session and that receiving of the right hand of fellowship it also happens at the induction of ministers it's a very important matter it's something that is significant in carrying it out and in observing it because what it means is that we who already exist as ministers and as elders in this congregation are welcoming these people into the kirk session or on the other hand into the deacon's court we're not just saying that we're accepting them in formally as members we're saying we're welcoming you to this position we receive you heartily and you see what he's saying is just as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God the best illustration of that is in Christ's own parable of the prodigal son and the father in that parable does not represent

God the father but rather Jesus himself because the parable is set in the context of Luke 15 of the scribes and the Pharisees who murmured who complained against Jesus with these words this man receives sinners and eats with them that's what that's what constrained Jesus to actually then give these three parables the third one being the prodigal son where the father represents this Jesus who receives sinners and eats with them who receives them into fellowship who welcomes them you can't imagine Jesus actually just receiving people informally and coldly without it being an actual welcome every Christian here every person who knows Christ as their savior will acknowledge that they were not just simply formally welcomed by him they were actually formally received by him they were welcomed by him they received his embrace they received his willing embrace of them into his fellowship and that again is the pattern when we think of how we have to be towards each other we need go no further than how we were received by Jesus welcomed welcomed welcomed wholeheartedly just think of the difference between the father in the parable of the prodigal and the son who had just come home think of the difference in appearance and what they had done or not done but there is no hesitation on the part of the father as he represents the savior to us no hesitation in receiving us as we come to him as we are in the filth of our sin and as we appeal to him to cover that from his holy sight he does it not reluctantly not putting us on probation for a time to see how we'll behave he does it there and then willingly and gladly welcomes but let me ask this have you been welcomed by Jesus are you here today and still outside of his welcome the prodigal came to the father as he represented

Jesus so we come to Jesus we come to him to receive his welcome we come to him because we need his embrace and we need him to assure us that we are indeed welcomed into the family of God if you haven't come yet to know that please don't delay in it please don't think that you have to make yourself somehow more acceptable before you will be received by the savior that it's a matter of what you do and how you do it and how well you do it and when you come to him and you say Lord I am a poor wretched sinner please receive me please accept me unworthy as I am don't leave me outside of your family and today that's the appeal of the gospel to everyone here who may not yet be saved come to Jesus come to know the God of encouragement the God of consolation the God of comfort the God of forbearance the God who fills us by his grace for every task he gives us

God who never fails God whom we cannot afford to be without and may God bless to us these thoughts on his word