



## **“Accept One Another”<sup>1</sup>**

### **Romans 15:7-13**

Recently, I was talking with a friend of mine who pastors in New York City. I was sharing with him my experiences at Ventura and how I’m able to be open and transparent with other men (both elders and the congregation). We seek to help each other and move forward together spiritually. I then said something like, “I’ve been a part of other good churches; however, none has been as wonderful as Ventura.” My friend’s response to me was humbling and encouraging. He said, “If you have that at Ventura, then never leave. The grass is not greener on the other side. If you ever get an offer for some other type of pastorate, it’s not worth leaving Ventura. The more pastors I talk to, the more I find out how rare something like Ventura is.”

He’s spoken to many pastors who have been hurt by the church, and I imagine many of you in this room have been hurt within other churches. Or, others of you simply have been to churches that were fine, but maybe pursuing Jesus and being transparent with one another just wasn’t a part of that church’s atmosphere. Now, the reason why I said I was humbled by my friend’s response was that I can think, “Why me, God?” My friend is godly. He’s more educated and articulate than I. Why not him? But then, I remind myself that this is all of God’s sovereign choice and grace. Then I praise God! But I also remind myself to keep praying that this not only continues but that this type of culture grows in our midst.

You see, many times in the Scriptures, we find stories of people eventually trampling on grace. Churches that were once strong eventually start coasting, then they start straying. How does this happen? I pray this doesn’t happen to Ventura. And, if you’re here today saying, “I once had a fire in my soul and now it’s barely an ember,” I’m speaking to you right now. Even if you’re here today saying, “I’m on fire,” I’m speaking to you! How do we keep fanning the flame of God’s glory in our midst?

I recall a quote by a man named Stephen Covey. You may have heard of his “7 Habits. . .” book. But he once wrote, **“The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”** Think about that statement. So many people can get off course in their lives by simply redirecting their focus on good things, but not main things. So, think about the Roman church. They have faith in Jesus, but their focus turns a little to other things. What once was in the periphery vision has become a part of the central vision. They’re focused on food, drink and arguments over holy days. You know, this can happen in churches in our day as well. Some people can make very spiritual arguments for their schooling choices as though the Bible prescribes *one* definitive choice. Then, people take sides and either judge the other side or despise the other side for their choice. Then, we can even find local churches that are “homeschool” type churches. Or, churches that are “Christian School” churches. Or, whatever other option. As Christ-followers, aren’t we all on the same team? Why don’t we talk about why we made our choices and how we can pray for

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

one another in the midst of the differences? What happens is that the philosophies that lead us to our decisions end up becoming central, and then Jesus is no longer central. And then, we use Jesus to back us up instead of seek Jesus together in order to inform all of our lives.

This can happen in other areas, too. I remember when Tracy and I had our first child, Isaiah, and then discovering the plethora of information on how you are supposed to parent your child. It seemed as though all options would end up making statements about people who “don’t do it” this way as though those parents are failures and don’t love their children. So, we put pacifiers in our kids mouths. We were fine with that even though it could lead to orthodontia issues. But some would speak as though we were morally failing our children. Really?! Instead, shouldn’t we as Christians talk about Christ and how Christ applies to our choices in parenting and also how Christ has set us free to make decisions so that our children will be responsible adults in our society as well as children who we pray will be drawn to Jesus? I’ve discovered many moms feel oppressed, and then they try to emphasize their choices as though they’re wanting to validate themselves. But if we spoke more from the gospel-perspective, we’d encourage each other that we’re already accepted in Christ and accountable to him, not to one another, in these debatable issues. (By the way, if at any point in what I’m saying, you’ve said, “That’s right! So and so needs to hear this,” I simply ask, “What are you doing right now? Are you judging or despising another person? Maybe you need to hear this.) If God’s glory in Jesus was emphasized always, local churches would be stronger because we’re continually pointing each other to the main thing: pursuing Jesus together, not pursuing practices together.

The list can go on-and-on, from how we dress to the types of food we eat or drink. History shows us, and the book of Romans here reveals to us, that humans are prone to want to elevate tertiary matters. But if we do this, we will unwittingly follow the design of Satan and destroy the church because the main thing (God’s glory in Jesus) was not kept as the main thing.

This is what the apostle Paul emphasizes in this text today. Even last week, Paul *prays* to the Lord that they would continue on in sacrificial love. This should be our prayer as well! And, in Paul moving forward and concluding his talk about loving one another in the local church, he again summons us to **Accept one another for the glory of God.** This “for the glory of God” means that God’s glory is God’s aim. One question some could ask is, “What does it mean to glorify God?” Simply put, it means to treasure God supremely in all of life: your words, your actions, your thoughts. In all you do, we are called to glorify God – reveal his magnificence and our valuing of his magnificence. And Paul says here that this glorying is supremely expressed when churches gather together in purposeful glorying of God.

Therefore, for the local church, the united glorying in God is God’s main aim for the church! In other words, we are to be a people who pursue Jesus together so that we *together* exalt God, edify his church and evangelize the world. We will see all of these pieces in the text today, and I hope this sermon realigns our hearts so that we continue to keep the main thing the main thing.

With this said, let’s read verses 7-13 from Romans 15. [Pray for Fern J, Calvary Baptist, Piatt’s]

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<sup>7</sup> Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

<sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, <sup>9</sup> and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” <sup>10</sup> And again it is said,

*“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”<sup>11</sup> And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.”<sup>12</sup> And again Isaiah says,<sup>13</sup> “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.”<sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.<sup>2</sup>*

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**Verse 7** was the concluding verse of last week’s sermon. In the ESV, it’s the final sentence in a paragraph. Why am I reading it again this week? Because verse 7 is a transition. We know that because verse 8 starts with a “For,” and a “for” builds on what was previous said. So, we have to look at verse 7 again. This verse actually is the command that compels the rest of what Paul states in verse 8-13. If you view 8-13 as separate from 7, then you’ll come up with a different sermon. Trust me, I almost went there. But verse 7 gives us the command and verses 8-13 give us the reasons for *why* we should obey. Paul says, “Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” The ESV has the word “Welcome,” the KJV and New King James have “receive.” The NIV and NASB have “accept.” All of these words are understandable and they give a little different nuance to the Greek word. We are to have open arms towards fellow followers of Jesus, even if and when there are differences on periphery issues. And, to welcome means that we don’t simply tolerate them, we accept them as brothers and sisters in Christ. They’re family. As a result, we have received them as our own. So, please don’t take “Welcome” simply to mean that we wave “hi” on Sundays. Paul has shown us that to welcome has a great depth of commitment and love to it.

We’ve already discovered this in chapter 14 and the early verses of 15, and we are going to continue to see this. Today, we see at least two reasons *why* we should accept one another.

### **1. Jesus has accepted us for God’s glory (vv. 8-9).**

We know that even from this verse itself. We are to accept one another as Christ has accepted us! I need to make something explicit here. Paul is not talking here about how we are to treat and behave towards the world around us. I said it last week and must say it again, the Bible speaks on loving and sacrificing for the world around us in other places in Scripture. Here, though, Paul is talking about our special relationship with those who have trusted Jesus. And, if you’re here today and you don’t know what that means, let me explain. Paul says to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us. Paul has spoken prolifically about what Jesus has done in order to welcome us into God’s loving arms. But he starts by telling us that we are all born sinful. In other words, we don’t want to glory in God. We glory in the things he has created. We in essence worship the stuff while rejecting the One who made all – and who made all so that we could honor him. We’ve stolen from his creation and sought to suppress him. Now, if I knew someone who rejected me and wanted to ignore me, but also wanted my stuff, I really wouldn’t want to pursue a friendship with them. Would you? Yet, Paul goes on in the book of Romans to reveal the justice of God, and how God has designed to draw people to himself. Through the amazing, sacrificial love of Jesus, we see a Savior who came to this earth in the flesh and then, in the flesh, died on the cross. And, while on the cross, he took the wrath of myriads of sinners upon himself, in their place. Then, Paul goes on in Romans 4 to talk about how all who turn from their sins and turn to the arms of the Savior will not only be welcomed, but will be forgiven and declared righteous in God’s sight! But Paul doesn’t stop there. He goes on to say that God is still patient and loving towards us – promising

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:7–13.

to help us grow in following him. And, someday, God will bring us home, eternally! This is what God's acceptance in Christ looks like.

And here, Paul says that as Christ has welcomed you, so welcome one another. That's commitment, isn't it? But it's not spoken of here as a drudgery. Instead, it should be a delightful duty! As Paul said, it's our obligation. But it's our freeing obligation. We can sacrifice ourselves, and walk in the footsteps of our Savior with joy, increasing in hope as we do this, because Paul goes on and says that we welcome *for the glory of God*. I stated this last week, but do you remember what the essence of sin is, according to Romans 1? Humanity doesn't glorify God. They glory in sin and want others to glory in sin. But now, Paul says that those who turn to Jesus, glory in God and we now want all others to grow in glorying in God. **Paul indicates that the only way this is going to grow and flourish is if we commit to accept one another in our local churches and focus on God's glory (his worth, his magnificence, his character) in Christ together.** Do you want to flourish in gospel hope and joy? Then we have to accept one another. And, Paul moves on to show that this was Jesus' intent all along.

Read verses 8-9 with me again: <sup>8</sup>For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, <sup>9</sup>and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.<sup>3</sup>

The word "for" is building off of what Paul just said. Accept one another as Christ has accepted you because the intent of Jesus in dying on the cross was to bring all nations together for God's glory! But, notice the specificity of Paul's wording here. He wants to show how Jew and Gentile have been welcomed in, while also showing Jesus' self-sacrifice. He says Jesus became a servant. In the book of Isaiah, we have prophecies of a suffering servant who was to come. It's potential Paul is bringing this idea out. So, the service Jesus rendered is talking about Jesus' suffering in the place of sinners. This suffering servant came to the circumcised – meaning, the Jewish people. Why did Jesus go to the Jews first? Because God made promises to the Jews. And, in coming to the Jews first, Jesus revealed God's truthfulness. For millenia, people trusted that there was one to come. They believed God was trustworthy, but they hadn't seen the fulfillment of his prophecies that there would be one to come who would crush the serpent, one to come through Abraham and all the nations would be blessed. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, Micah 7:20 says, **"You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, just as you swore to our fathers in the days beforehand."** Do you see God's truthfulness mentioned here according to God's promises? Paul says that Jesus' servitude to Israel confirms all God promised. And, by the way, Paul writes this is what's called the *perfect* tense, which means that Jesus is still a servant to Israel, still having a plan for people in Israel (like what he said in Romans 10-11).

But notice that Jesus didn't come only to the Jewish people. Jesus came to the Gentiles. More than likely, Paul is saying here that **Jesus became a servant to the circumcised in order to confirm the promises to the Jews and so that the Gentiles would glorify God.** I actually think that in Jesus confirming the promises to the Jews, that means that there will be Jews who believe and will then glorify God! This is part of the promise of God in the Old Testament – that God would give them hearts that are circumcised, meaning hearts that would want to praise God! And, so Paul moves on and says that God designed for this to be the case for the Gentiles, too! Jesus died on the cross so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:8–9.

Why is Paul emphasizing this? Remember that the debates happening in the Roman church were essentially over ethnic and religious issues that separated the Jews from the Gentiles. But Jesus didn't come to separate the Jews from the Gentiles. He came to unite them together so that *together*, they might glorify God. At this point, though, you could say, "Well, then this text has no application to us today. We don't have issues between Jew and Gentile here. As a matter of fact, I know of no messianic Jews in our church." But the principles being used here can apply to us. Jesus died to bring unity in the church across ethnic lines and in the midst of diverse viewpoints that are not central to the faith. In addition, even if we simply take the point that Jesus died so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy, we can apply that to us here. How many non-Jewish people do we have here in this room? Raise your hands. Ok, are we called to glorify God for his mercy *together*? Yes? Alright, that's the main thing!

But you say, "What's mercy?" A simplistic definition has been that mercy is when you don't get what you do deserve. And, while in some contexts that might work, I think mercy is greater than that. In the Old Testament, the word for mercy refers to God's steadfast love. It's a love that doesn't waver because it doesn't depend on circumstances. It's committed. It's covenantal. Do you know that before time began, God decided to set his mercy on you? That's steadfast love! And he has worked in glorious ways in order to draw *us* to him. What mercy!

So, think through how mercy fits within this call for us to exercise sacrificial love towards one another. How committed does the Lord want us to be towards each other? Steadfast. And, does the Lord want us to be loving in our commitment? Yes! Paul said in chapter 13 to owe no one anything but to love. So, "Mercy" is a wonderful term here. We should always be glorying together in the mercy of God towards us! Again, Paul is making this statement in order to help the people to apply the command to accept one another. How does glorying in God's mercy *together* encourage us to grow in sacrificing for one another? Imagine I put a cup under a fountain. As long as it's under the fountain, it can fill up any cup that comes under it. But imagine I take away the cup from the fountain. Only for a while can that cup give some water to others. What Paul is suggesting in these verses is that if we're together glorying in God for his mercy, and focusing on Christ, depending on him in the Spirit, we're like cups under the fountain and we'll show sacrificial love towards others. But if you cease from glorying in God, you'll be zapped. But, if we truly are coming together to praise God together. When we meet together at MWF or Sunday School or get together for a lunch or whatever the circumstance, may we seek to glory in God together on the basis of his mercy towards us!

Therefore, continually accept one another for God's glory. Why? Because Jesus has accepted us for God's glory. Then Paul moves into what I think can be termed a second reason. Although, it's bundled in with the previous.

## **2. The Scriptures prophecy united glorying in God (vv. 9-12).**

These verses are all following from verse 7. Paul is giving us the command of God and then showing us how the command of God for local church unity flows from his eternal purposes! Here Paul goes back to the Scriptures to show it's always been God's purpose to bring people together in united glorying in God. As a result, the Roman church (and, our church) should seek to live out this purpose. God will be faithful to grace us to live this way.

What's interesting here is that what Paul does in the next few verses is draw quotes from every part of the Old Testament: the Psalms, the Law, and the Prophets. Why might he do this. I wonder if he's addressing our tendency to disbelieve something new to us. Paul now unveils God's plan for his people

that he's had all along. God has ordered that the church will grow in unified praise of him! This is the main thing! But you could say, "I thought unity is the main point of Paul in this text. You're telling me that glorifying God is the main thing! Which is it?" It's both. It's the united glorying in God. And, God's glory is supreme. Think again back to Romans 1. People are passionate for what they love and they'll do a lot to get others to love what they love, whether it's a hobby or sinful choices. How much more should we do anything to help others to glory in God more – especially those around us who love Jesus?! We would sacrifice so that God can be praised more because God's glory is our eternal good!

Now, let's look at verses 9-12 again: As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name."<sup>10</sup> And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."<sup>11</sup> And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him."<sup>12</sup> And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope."<sup>4</sup> Let's walk through each quotation to bring out the main thing Paul is emphasizing.

The first quotation is probably from **Psalm 18:49**. In this psalm, David is speaking. David was promised a throne that would never cease, and in the Old Testament, David is a type of the Christ who is to come. David praises God for giving him victory over Gentile nations and thus can praise God among the Gentiles. In a much greater way, Jesus, through his death and resurrection, reigns on a throne and is calling people from every tribe, nation and tongue. And, Jesus praises God the Father among the Gentiles. We here are Gentiles and we praise God the Father with Jesus, our Savior! How glorious is this thought?! To the Jews, they would hear this verse thinking of David (or, Jesus), a Jew, worshipping with Gentiles. For us, we think of the amazing mercy of God in drawing us to himself and thus are reminded that we are called to glorify God together with our Savior, Jesus. That's why we say *pursuing Jesus Together so we can exalt God!*

This first quotation emphasizes Jesus and his accomplishment. The next quotation comes from **Deuteronomy 32:43**. This was written in Moses' day, and God is calling Gentiles to worship him! This has always been God's intention. However, we don't see a lot of Gentiles worshipping God in the Old Testament time period, do we? But Paul quotes this in his time period to reveal that because of Jesus' victory in his death and resurrection, now Gentiles who were summoned to praise God actually can praise God. And, they praise God with God's people, the Jews! God has broken down the dividing walls so that Jews and Gentiles come together through faith in Jesus Christ! In both of these quotes, we see the emphasis of glorying in God, right? This continues in verse 11.

Verse 11 is a quotation from **Psalm 117:1**. This is the shortest psalm in the psalter. And, this psalm calls Gentiles to praise the Lord. Interestingly, the second verse of this psalm mentions God's mercy and truth (as Paul has just mentioned) as a reason for praising God. But you notice, Paul calls the Gentiles to praise, and then says, "Let all the peoples extol him." Again, God has called for a united glorying in him. His steadfast love and truth have come to you in Jesus – the One who is love and Truth. So, let's praise him with God's people.

Finally, we get to verse 12. This is a quotation from **Isaiah 11:10**. The phrase "root of Jesse" is a messianic term, showing that the Messiah came from the Jews and even to the Jews – as part of God's truthful promises. And this Messiah also came to graciously rule over Gentiles as well. So, Jews and Gentiles again come together.

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<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:9–12.

Let's take a step back for a moment. Getting the bigger context, we can see how Paul says that the main thing is God's glory in Jesus. Or, *pursuing Jesus together* so we can exalt God and edify the church. And, in living this way, we see God *evangelizing the world*. This has been God's plan all along. Well, if this is God's plan, then shouldn't we live this out as a local church?

Let me say it a little differently. United praise is God's aim for his people. Have you ever heard someone say before, "I don't need the church in order to go to Heaven?" That's such a sad statement to me because there are plenty of sins we can commit and still go to Heaven. We should ask a different question, "Because of God's mercy towards me, how can I grow in glorifying him?" And, Paul shows us here, "Glorify God with his people, in a united way. Don't make side issues the main point. Make God's glory in Christ the main point."

But again, let me emphasize, God's plan is that we would glory in God *together*. It's not enough for you to simply say, "I can praise God in my car or at home or all alone." Yes, you can and you should. But Romans shows us that if you glory in God's glory, God has ordained for you to want to grow in glorying in God's glory as you glory with others who have been set free in Jesus! God's aim is that we wouldn't praise alone.

And, notice the variations of words that Paul quotes from in these Old Testament passages. They're all different ways to glory in God. We praise with gratitude. We sing. We rejoice, meaning have great joy in God. We extol – meaning to lift high. And finally, Paul says the Gentiles *hope* in him. To hope in God reveals his glory. That's interesting isn't it? But, as a church gathers together in united praise of God, we have *hope* in God. And, as we express this hope in God, our hope increases. As we serve one another in encouraging each other to praise God, even in differences, our *hope* increases.

Oh, how desperately the world needs hope. In the past few decades, death by suicide has increased 2-3 times. Studies are showing that our society is more hopeless than ever. Yet, even we can even lose sight of hope. But Paul says that God's design is that we would have steadfast hope as we grow *together* as a local church. In other words, as we welcome one another, we will grow in these other ways.

Yet, we can come to this point and again say, "How do I do this?" And the answer is **God**. Paul again ends this section with a prayer. Verse 13 says, "<sup>13</sup> **May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.**"<sup>5</sup> You aren't going to sacrifice. You aren't going to pursue unity. You aren't going to glory in God's glory with others. And, our church will not continue in sacrificial love and transparency with each other *unless* God continues to grant us his mercy.

So, Paul prays that the God is hope would fill us with joy and peace in believing. The joy of the Lord is our strength. We need joy – not simply happiness in positive circumstances. We need joy in God. And we need peace. And, this word for peace isn't simply feelings of internal calm. It's wrong to say, "God hasn't given me peace because I don't feel it." Peace here is talking about the literal peace we have with God and one another. God has given it to us – now live in the peace you have! Through faith, through dependence on the Lord, putting ourselves under his fountain, we can grow in joy and peace. And, as a result, the Spirit will increase our hope even more. Since God's big plan is for Jews and Gentiles to worship together, this big plan should apply to the local churches as well!

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<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:13.

This growth in godliness will only happen as we grow in taking steps to accept one another as Jesus has accepted us. Let's not accept each other because of periphery practices like food, drink, dress, schooling choices, parenting issues, job status, ethnicity. Let's always ask if we're seeking to explicitly help one another to glory in the God who unified us! Accept one another, and bear with one another, as Christ has accepted you!

So, as I said at the beginning of the sermon, when my friend said, "never leave Ventura," I was grateful for God's mercy, but it also leads me to pray. And, I hope this leads you to pray, too. Where are you spiritually? Are you hiding? Are you dry? Do you need to talk to someone right now? Are you feeling hopeless? Maybe you know you're not welcoming and you simply need to take time to pray. I'm going to ask that the musicians come up to play for a little while to give you time to respond. If you need to get someone and walk out, do it. This is the time. I expect many of us could benefit from this, and if there's only 10 of us singing here, that'd be wondrous. But **remember, the main thing: God's glory and his steadfast love (mercy) and truthfulness towards you. He's set us free to glory in his glory. This is God's cosmic design for his people, and we are a part of his people. Let's pursue Jesus together for the glory of God and pray to that end!**

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