

Christ Glorified in the Church

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[0 : 00] I invite you to turn with me this evening to Romans chapter 15. This evening we're going to be speaking about one of the ways in which God is glorified! Specifically, we're going to be looking at how God is glorified by the presence of Gentiles in the church.

The presence of Gentiles in the church means the presence of weak people. And as a result, it's often a messy thing.

And yet, nonetheless, God is glorified by the presence of Gentiles in the church. It is God's purpose to bring many peoples together into one body.

Romans chapter 15. Let's read, first of all, verses 8 through 12. Paul says, 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, 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. And again it is said, Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.

[1 : 26] And again, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, let all the peoples extol Him. And again Isaiah says, The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles.

In him will the Gentiles hope. Dear Father, in him we hope. You have called us together into one body.

People from every nation. People from every tongue. People from every tribe. You've brought us all together into one body for the glory of your Son.

Help us to understand the glory of this. Help us to, as we understand, to bear with one another. To uphold the weak.

And to in that way live out the reality of the gospel. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. The book of Romans is of course a missionary book.

[2 : 26] We know it's a missionary book, at least the context, the historical context, it's a missionary book. Paul writes it to the believers at the city of Rome. He has plans to arrive at Rome and he wants to come to them.

He wants to find a certain amount of help from them. And he wants to use Rome as a base to go further, to go to Spain, maybe go as far as Great Britain. So we know that the historical context of the book is missions.

But we can read sometimes the book of Romans and think it's just a theological treatise on the gospel. Well, it certainly is that. It's the most complete exposition of the gospel that Paul gives us in the New Testament.

But if we look closely, we'll see that the idea of mission is weaved throughout the book. Mission, the mission of God, the mission of Christ, his mission, and the way mission affects the life of believers, the way it shapes the church.

Every page of the book is a missionary page. And this passage is no different. Paul is talking about the reality of a mixed church.

[3 : 40] And he wants us to understand why the church is as it is and what we should do about it or how we should live and how that is part of God's great missionary plan.

The immediate context we see in the first verses of the chapter. Paul says, The context is Paul is giving them instruction on how they should deal with diversity in the church and how they should deal with weak brethren.

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good to build him up.

For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through

endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant to 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.

[4 : 57] Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. He's dealing with the reality that there's a mixed group of people in the church of Rome.

There were Jews and there were Gentiles. The city of Rome was the most cosmopolitan city of the ancient world. There were Jewish believers who had escaped the persecution in Palestine, who had ended up in Jerusalem.

They came with still carrying their baggage left over from their years as followers of the ancient religion. They would still be concerned about dietary restrictions.

They'd still be concerned about numerous things that weren't necessarily things that were appropriate for the gospel. Sometimes they had a difficult time sorting through those things, which were really part of an older administration of God and which really belonged to the present, and understanding that the gospel being a gospel of grace meant that there were nailed things that should be just considered cultural issues that shouldn't be imposed on others.

At the same time, there were Gentiles who had come to Christ, who had heard this wonderful news that the Messiah, that what he had done, that his death on the cross was not just for the Jews, but it was for all peoples everywhere.

[6 : 13] And they'd heard this message and they'd heard it gladly, and they'd come to Christ. But they came in, there were people from Africa, there were people from Greece, there were people from perhaps from every part of the ancient, from the Roman Empire.

And they would have come in with their customs and with their views and with a mixture of false philosophy. Some of them would have tended towards Gnosticism. Some of them would have been concerned about what they should eat and what they couldn't eat.

And about, just like the Jews, but coming from a different angle, they'd be concerned about what days should be reserved as holy days and what days didn't matter. And so all these things, all of a sudden, all these different opinions, and they come together and it's a perfect recipe for conflict. Men being men, people being people with a tendency towards prejudice, the natural result was that often there would be conflict in the churches.

Differences in racial backgrounds, national backgrounds, differences in social classes, we see that, problems like that in the church of Corinth. It was a common problem in the churches.

[7 : 29] So Paul speaks to them and says, like in the passage the pastor read before we began, the importance of love and the importance of remembering that we are all under the cross.

So here he tells them, we who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

You know, the world always tends to produce hierarchies. We have a way of saying this kind of person is best and this kind of person is second best.

When you go to high school, everybody divides up into cliques. And your place in society depends on maybe the way you look or certain skills that you possess, if you're good at athletics, if you're good at music.

And it all gets segmented. It's a natural tendency of human society. And it's natural for people to stand within the context of their group, the protection of their group, and look at other groups and despise them, to look down on them, to say, my kind of people are really the best kind of people.

[8 : 48] And the gospel brings together all kinds of people and mixes them together in this thing called the church.

Paul says, who's the weak? I'm not sure who he's referring to. There are different theories on who the strong are and who the weak are.

But I've begun to wonder if he's not really, almost speaking kind of tongue-in-cheek, those of us who are strong, you consider yourself to be strong.

Well, I'm strong too. So let's talk to each other as strong people. You think you're strong. If you're really strong, you have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak.

Groucho Marx said, I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member. That's probably closer to the truth. Paul writes about the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1.

[9 : 58] In verse 26, he says, For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. If we are strong, is it because we are strong or is it because we are in him? He is our wisdom. He is our strength. He is our power. So Paul says to the Romans, he says, he's thinking the same thing, I think.

[11 : 04] He says, none of you, you know, you're really not that hot. You're really not that important. By the world's standards, you're certainly, for the most part, there's not much going on here. We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak.

Now, the next thing we need to understand is the way in which the presence of weak people in the church is actually a product.

It really flows from the very nature of the gospel. Why is the church full of weak people? The church is full of weak people because the church is a diverse body and the church is a diverse body because this is the very nature of the gospel.

And we can find that in Romans in numerous places. But specifically, let's go to Romans 1. Romans 1 and the verse that many consider to be sort of the theme verses of the entire book.

Verse 16, verse 17, he says, for I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first, to the Jew first, but also to the Greek.

[12 : 24] This is a revolutionary claim. The gospel is not just for a people. It's not just for a specific national group. The gospel is for all people. It starts with the Jews because this was God's historical plan.

It began with a promise to Abraham. But it's not just for the Jews. It's to the Jews first and also to the Greek. For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written.

The righteous shall live by faith. And the righteous who live by faith can be drawn from every nation, every group in the world. In Romans chapter 10, where Paul says, this is the message that we declare, we find the same principles.

In verse 8, he says, but what does it say? The word is near you and in your heart, in your mouth and in your heart. That is the word of faith that we proclaim. Here's our message. This is our missionary message.

This is what we preach. Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[13 : 38] That's a promise. If you will confess with your mouth and believe with your heart, you'll be saved. For with the heart one believes and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Verse 11 says this, For the scripture says, everyone, everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. Again, something revolutionary.

In verse 12, he says, For there is no distinction. There is no distinction between Jew and Greek. For the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. The diversity that we find in the church flows from the very nature of the gospel.

It's a message of hope and salvation to everyone. And all who call upon the name of the Lord are guaranteed to be saved. It doesn't matter where you're from, what you look like, what your level of education is, what's in your bank account.

[14 : 49] The promise is universal. All who believe, all who confess, all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. And he's the one who reaches out to people. He draws people unto himself.

It's not our work. It's not our work. So he draws those that he desires to draw. And he draws people from everywhere. It's the nature of the gospel.

It's a universal offer. All who believe, regardless of where you come from, regardless of who you are, regardless of what you've done, regardless of how low you sink, the gospel's for you.

Well, the nature of the gospel shapes the church. The nature of this offer, the nature of this amazing good news, gives shape to the church.

The presence of the weak in the church is a product of the broadness of the gospel appeal. So Paul says, if you understand the gospel, if you understand the nature of this offer, then you must welcome one another.

[16:06] Why does he have to tell them to welcome one another? Because there's this incredible diversity in the church. And it's not easy. It's not easy. There's something about the gospel that brings people together who are of many different backgrounds.

You know one of the miraculous things about the cross, you know, you go anywhere else and people congregate based on different things. Socioeconomic, based on race.

In church, we tend to, if we're not careful, we tend to get with those people in the church that are a lot like us. We have the same background.

Young couples with young couples, older couples with older couples. And we can start talking about other distinctions. Those are some of the easiest. Sports fans like to stand around and talk about sports with other sports fans.

But if you ever found yourself talking with someone and realized, you know what, the only thing I've got in common with this person, the only thing I've got in common with this person is that we both love Jesus.

[17:11] Nothing else is the same. But the most important thing is what draws us together. Paul says in verse 5, chapter 15, may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus.

In accord with Christ Jesus. In other words, in accord with his purposes. In accord with what he's doing. In accord with the way he's building his church. Live with each other in harmony in accord with Christ Jesus.

That together, because by doing this, by living together, by doing something that never happens in the world. Because in the world we divide up according to our preferences, according to all these different things.

He says, by doing this, 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. You think you're strong. Maybe you're not that strong. Maybe you're weak like everyone else.

[18:23] But think about this. God has welcomed you. The Father has called you to himself. The Father has put in you his spirit by which you call out, Abba Father. And you look around you and there's brothers, on the surface, they're different.

They're rich, they're poor, some of them are obnoxious, some of them are hard to cope with. But you know what? They've been called by Christ to himself. Love them.

Because by doing that, you give testimony to the reality, to the true power, to the transcendent, transforming power of the gospel.

Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. We had, a number of years ago in Cordoba, you know, explain that our church, down there, we planted the church close to the university.

It was very much on purpose. We wanted to reach university kids because just for the leadership potential that we saw in those university students, the trouble with that we discovered is that people naturally say, okay, well this is a church that's for university people or this is a church for people who are professionals.

[19:44] We had, I had an experience where I was standing on the sidewalk in front of the church and this old lady came by and she walked by and she would look in and then she would go on down to the end of the block and then she would come by again and she would look inside and I could tell she was from a poor neighborhood.

You just look at people and you know where they're coming from. And so I stopped her and I said, how are you doing? And I said, would you like to come into church? And she was kind of like intimidated and surprised that I spoke to her.

And then she said, finally, yes I would and she did and she came in and she loved it. And she ended up staying in our church becoming a part of our church. And then a couple of weeks after she had started coming to our church she said, you know, I'd seen the church a number of times and I loved the music and I wanted to come in but I saw everybody that arrived at the church they were all driving cars so I knew nobody would want me to be here.

And so she had never gotten up the courage to come into the church. These are the kind of ideas we have that this church is for rich people and this church is for, this is a black church or this is a Spanish church.

Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. You see, God's missionary purpose is worked out in the life of the church.

[21 : 06] It should be worked out in the life of the church. We should live it out in the church. And because it's lived out in the church it's also got to affect each of our individual lives. As some of you know I'm a bit of a William Carey nerd.

I've been studying William Carey for a number of years. William Carey of course was the father of modern missions. Went to India as a missionary in 1792. One of the first things that they encountered after they began to see people come to Christ of course as soon as they arrived they ran into the caste system.

The caste system meant that people were divided along very strict lines. Carey wasn't the first missionary to arrive. the Catholics had come years before and the Danes had sent missionaries who had done some work in southern India.

And what they discovered was that the Danes in southern India had gone along with the caste system. They thought well you know this is just part of their culture and you know it's really no different than cultural differences that we have in Europe where we have people who are royalty people who are of the nobility and people who are of different classes so this is really no different than that and so they allowed the caste system to survive in the context of the church.

So people who came to Christ were allowed to preserve caste. Well the result of that was divided churches because one caste would not eat with another. One caste would not sit in the same room with the other and so they ended up having some people in a separate room they ended up having in fact separate churches for different castes because they would not come together in one body.

[22 : 59] William Carey insisted that that was demonic and I think he's right because it divides the body of Christ and it destroys the significance of the Lord's Supper where we all come together and we all share in one spiritual food one body saved by one sacrifice one Lord one baptism and so Carey said we're not going to do that in fact one of the people who wrote about Carey later on said that they knew that this would make the work slower that if they wanted quick growth it was best to just go with the caste system he said we're not going to do that because it does violence to scriptures and it does violence to the significance of the Lord's Supper it does violence to the church itself and so what they required was that when someone was baptized they immediately sat down to a communal meal with the other brethren and by doing this broke caste they put behind their old way of life and now they said we are part of one body this is our family now that way of thinking about caste amazingly has snuck into

American church growth theories there's a direct link between the idea that we should just let people that there's a homogeneous church planting principle which is the idea that we shouldn't force people to come to Christ we shouldn't make them feel uncomfortable by having to sit next to people who are of a different social background and there are entire churches in the United States built on this principle there are books in all the Christian bookstores that promote this principle and when you begin to understand what Paul is saying you begin to understand that Cary is right and it truly is demonic Paul says there's three reasons in the next verses verses 8 through 12 there's three reasons that Christ became a servant for I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised he gives us three reasons first of all to show God's truthfulness second of all to confirm his covenant promises and thirdly so that the

Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy 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 why did Christ become a servant in other words why did Christ become God in the flesh why was he made incarnate why did Christ become a missionary Christ came as a missionary number one to show God's truthfulness this is a major theme in the book of Romans chapter 3 verse 4 he says Paul is concerned about defending the truthfulness of God and about his righteousness as he works out the plan of salvation he's defending

God I heard I saw on a blog the other day that a major preacher of a major church said recently that God to show his love to us broke his own law like what no he did not that's exactly what Paul is saying Paul is saying in chapter 3 that God found the way in which he could be the justifier of those who were unrighteous and yet be righteous at the same time in Romans chapter 3 verse 21 through

26 he says but now here this is the very heart of the gospel right here so he says but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law although the law and prophets bear witness to it the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe for there is no distinction and notice the universality of these statements there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the God who's weak and who's the strong who is the strong is it me I'm not strong I've sinned for there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith these verses are the heart of the gospel and this verse is the very heart of the heart of the gospel he sent his son to be a propitiation he endured what we should have endured and by his sacrifice he achieved two things propitiation first of all he washed us cleansed us of our sins and secondly he caused God's righteous anger to turn aside it fell on him instead of on us his anger was propitiated whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith this was to show

[29 : 06] God's righteousness this was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he passed over former sins it was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus so Jesus came as a servant he came as a missionary to establish the law and to be both just and justifier to do what no one thought could be possible for Christ to forgive our sins and remain absolutely righteous well he does that for us and he does that for everyone who calls upon his name for everyone and this is unthinkable to some people the Jews were how could this be because it was only for the Jews wasn't it how could it be that this is extended to all peoples to show

God's truthfulness and his righteousness the second reason that Jesus became a servant became a missionary was to confirm his covenant promises 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 what were those promises Genesis chapter 12 Genesis chapter 12 he says I will make of you a great nation I will give you a land and in you every family of the earth will be blessed in you all the families all the peoples all the tribes all the nations of the earth would be blessed Jesus became a servant to show God's truthfulness he became a missionary to confirm his covenant promises and he became a missionary that the

Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy 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 and in order and this is where Paul just takes off he starts pulling things out of the Old Testament it's like a an old time preacher man now he's getting with it and in order 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 and again it is said rejoice oh Gentiles with his people and again praise the Lord all you Gentiles and let all the peoples all the peoples plural let all the peoples extol him and again Isaiah says the root of Jesse will come even he who arises to rule the Gentiles in him will the Gentiles hope what are you hoping in where is your hope is it in your business is it in your family and it's your hope it's not in the political process in him but the Gentiles hope our hope is in Jesus we who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves it's the very nature of the church to be full of weak people weak people drawn from every segment of society and that can be very messy it's not always easy but brethren it is glorious it is truly glorious because as we see the diversity of people that Christ calls into his church we understand that this is not a man driven process because we wouldn't do this we wouldn't do this it's the very power of God he calls together his church and he calls us to live in humility with each other because as we do that we glorify the son may the

God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus that together wherever you come from whatever your background is that together together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ therefore welcome one another as Christ welcomed you for the glory of God verse 613 he says may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope where's our hope Isaiah says the root of Jesse will come even he who arises to rule the Gentiles in him will the

[35 : 25] Gentiles hope dear Jesus we hope in you there is no hope in this world we look at the world and it's just more discouraging but you rule and we ask you to rule in our churches and we ask you to rule in our hearts and we ask you to help us to love one another and to welcome one

another as you have welcomed us in Jesus name I pray Amen