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Sermon Notes

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Jew-Gentile Unity: Eternal Glory for God

Romans 15:7-13

I. The Seemingly Insurmountable Problem: Genuine Unity

A. Modern Chapters of an Ancient Struggle

1. Recent events: Hezbollah and Israel

The recent kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah in Lebanon have triggered the escalation of open warfare between Israeli and Hezbollah forces that has captured world attention

The core of the Hezbollah organization in Lebanon comes from 'Iranian Revolutionary Guards' sent to Lebanon in 1982, at the time of Israel's invasion of Southern Lebanon designed to oust the PLO. They went to assist in the establishment of a revolutionary Islamic movement whose members would participate in the 'Jihad', Holy War, against Israel from bases in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. Hezbollah dreamt of transforming Lebanon's multi-religion state into an Iranian-style Islamic state. Its ideology, as expressed in declarations by its leadership, maintained that Israel had no legitimacy as a state, and that it must be fought until Jerusalem, meaning all of Israel, is liberated.

Over its two decades, Hezbollah has evolved into a movement with thousands of trained guerrillas, members of the Lebanese parliament and a dynamic welfare program benefiting thousands of Lebanese people. They enjoy considerable support in Lebanon both because their rage against Israel is popular and because their social programs are effective in meeting ground level needs. Since Israel is no longer present in Lebanon, Hezbollah now talks about the elimination of Israel itself calling all of Israel "occupied territory" that has to be "liberated" for Islam.

Israel's basic problem: how do you negotiate with a group who's sole purpose is to eliminate you completely and replace you in your own land?

2. Constant efforts at resolution, some award-winning... NONE ULTIMATELY EFFECTIVE

- a. Jimmy Carter's efforts at Camp David with Anwar Sadat and Meachem Begin in 1978 led to the Camp David Accords... but this treaty also led to Sadat's assassination in 1981

- b. Oslo Agreement of 1993: Yitzhak Rabin of Israel and Yasser Arafat of the PLO, brokered by Bill Clinton, signed on September 13, 1993

1994 Nobel Peace Prize awarded jointly to: Yasser Arafat, Simon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin

However, the very next year, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a radical Jewish law student who opposed Rabin's efforts in the Mid-East Peace Process

AND Yasser Arafat did not carry out his side of the agreement because his settled commitment was stated way back in 1970, in a statement in the Washington Post:

“The goal of our struggle is the end of Israel, and there can be no compromise.”

- c. U.S., European, Russian, and United Nations efforts since then... endless efforts: “Roadmap to Peace in the Middle East” has prove unattainable
3. True lasting peace between Jews and Gentiles seems as impossible now as it did centuries ago
 4. There is still a “dividing wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles... and only in Christ is it removed
 5. So one generation of peace negotiators after another can try to solve the Mid-East crisis; some may make headway for a while and perhaps will win Nobel Peace Prizes
 6. But a simple line in a hymn said it best: “May Jesus Christ Be Praised”

Ye nations of mankind
 In this your concord find
 May Jesus Christ be praised!
 Let all the earth around
 Ring joyous with the sound
 May Jesus Christ be praised!

Only the Advance of the Gospel can genuinely reconcile Jews and Gentiles

Only the Second Coming of Christ can bring about perfect peace on earth, goodwill toward men

B. Jew-Gentile Conflict a Subset of Human Conflict

1. You may ask, “How is Jew-Gentile conflict in the first century church in Rome relevant to my life?”
2. Well, it is a paradigm of all human conflict and division

3. At root: sinners have no peace with God, therefore, they have no peace within themselves

Isaiah 57:20-21 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ²¹ "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

4. The habits of selfishness and bad relating carry over into our Christian lives as well
5. The Jew-Gentile conflict in the first century church is hardly different at all from modern Baptist churches splitting over power or politics or doctrine or the color of the carpet in the new sanctuary
6. Neither is it different from strife in marriages or between parents and children or between siblings or among neighbors or co-workers
7. Deep division and conflict between sinners is the basic effect of sin; and only the reconciliation of the gospel can produce genuine change

C. The Church at Rome: Seeds of Its Destruction Already Planted

1. Mixed church, Jew + Gentile
2. How then shall we live? What about the Laws of Moses?
3. The Jew-Gentile Issue always in the background in Romans
 - a. Pagan, Gentile sinners described in Romans 1
 - b. Jewish legalistic and arrogant sinners described in Romans 2
 - c. "All have sinned" a uniting factor... but it is also the root of the problem
 - d. Sometimes Paul addresses Jews, sometimes Gentiles
4. In Romans 11, his great concern is that Gentiles would not become arrogant and boast over the fallen state of unbelieving Israel
5. In Romans 14, his concern reverses and he is strong to argue against those weak in faith (Jews) who think the Laws of Moses must still have the same function in a life pleasing to God: we must still circumcise our children, still refrain from eating certain foods, still observe the Sabbath and festivals
6. BUT in Romans 14 he also addresses those strong in faith (probably Gentiles), telling them not to flaunt their freedoms to the great damage of their Jewish brothers and sisters
7. Romans 15: Accept one another... Jew-Gentile unity

D. Unity of the Church Essential to Its Mission

1. The power of the Gospel to reconcile sinners to God MUST BE MADE OBVIOUS in the world by its power to reconcile people
2. As the Gospel makes its powerful advance in the world, it MUST show itself powerful to reconcile sinners to each other as well as to God
3. A divided, bickering, fighting selfish church CANNOT advance the Kingdom of God
4. As the world watches, it must be overwhelmed by the way we love each other
5. Tertullian: Early church unity

Tertullian (c.197) said, "It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. They say, '**Behold how they love one another!**' ...And they are angry with us, too, because we call each other brother."

6. Two key statements of Christ prove this forever

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 17:20-21, 23 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ... ²³ May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

The unity between Christians in heaven will be absolutely perfect... no racism, no rich-poor divisions, no "haves and have-nots", no tribal exclusions... just a perfect unity patterned after the Trinity

Yes, that's in heaven... but the process of UNIFICATION, of reconciliation must be OBVIOUS and VISIBLE in the present world era, so that unbelievers can OBSERVE IT happening and believe that Christ is God's Son

E. Ten Remedies to Jew-Gentile Division Listed

- Understand God's Ultimate Purpose: His Own Glory
- Understand God's Second Purpose: Our Delight in His Glory
- Obey God's Command: Accept Each Other
- Follow Christ's Pattern of Acceptance
- Understand Christ's Servanthood to the Jews
- Understand Christ's Commitment to God's Truth

- Believe God's Promises to the Patriarchs
- Glorify God for His Mercy to Both Jews and Gentiles
- Understand the Prophecies of Jew-Gentile Unity
- Hope in Our Glorious Future Together

II. Ten Remedies from Paul

Overall point: Christ has come to accomplish an eternal plan from God. The center of that plan is the glory of God, and His loving desire for the sinful human race is to find our eternal happiness in a heavenly life of worship of His glory. The worshipers were chosen before the foundation of the world from every tribe, language, people and nation. God's plan was to call out the Jews first, to reveal His worldwide saving intent through promises made to them and prophecies made by the prophets. Then, in the fullness of time, Christ came to the Jews only, to serve them in life (by miracles and teachings and example) and to serve them in death by His atoning crucifixion. Yet it was always with an eye to fulfilling God's worldwide saving purposes for BOTH Jews and Gentiles that Christ came.

Therefore, now, Paul's ministry is to accomplish the fullness of the Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel. God's final plan WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED... as elect from every nation will gather around the throne of Christ and glorify God for His mercy to them. Since this has always been God's plan and since that plan is actually being worked out in space and time before their very eyes, in the successful ministry of Paul to the Gentiles, it makes perfect sense for the Roman church, a mixed church of Jews and Gentiles, to accept one another and love one another and cherish one another... since they will be spending eternity doing it

Key points:

- All things are done to glorify God... that is the center of everything
- The salvation plan was worked out before the foundation of the world
- It included BOTH Jews AND Gentiles from the very beginning
- Christ is the Pattern for Jew-Gentile Unity: He accepted sinners like us, we should accept each other
- Jew-Gentile unity in worshiping God was prophesied to the patriarchs and the prophets
- The ultimate end: Elect representatives from every nation will be perfectly united in worshiping God forever
- So we should accept one another deeply, gladly now, as Christ has accepted us

A. Remedy #1: Understand God's Ultimate Purpose: His Own Glory

1. Man-centered thinking is the root of all human division

- a. We make far too much of ourselves and our own happiness and selfish ends
 - b. Not until the human heart is captivated by something more glorious and more compelling will it give up its petty agendas
 - c. Racism and selfish national pride is a form of self-worship
 - d. All self-worship is really IDOLATRY
 - e. BUT God's glory alone is the true center of the universe
2. What do we mean by "the glory of God"?
- a. It means the radiant, brilliant display of God's essential nature
 - b. It involves light from God and truth about God together... the center of it is God's own person, His nature, what He is like

Imagine: The shepherds sitting around the campfire arguing or bickering about whose sheep were the best or who would get to water the sheep first in the morning... their selfish natures drove the argument UNTIL the angel of the Lord appeared and the GLORY of the Lord shone all around

The greater selfless interest in glory drove out the lesser selfish interest in arguing

3. How does Paul put the glory of God at the center here?

^{ESV} Romans 15:7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Not, as the NIV has:

Romans 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

But simply for the display of God's glory

- a. Paul puts God at the center by giving the reason WHY Christ welcomed us
- b. We, the wretched rebellious sinners... deserving of wrath and hell... we, shaking our fists at God, whose throats are open graves and whose tongues practice deceit... we whose feet are swift to shed blood, ruin and misery mark our ways and the way of peace we do not know... we who were God's bitter enemies, CHRIST WELCOMED US...received us warmly!!
- c. Why? "For the glory of God"
- d. To put God on display, to exalt and display the glory of God

- e. God's attributes are at the center of a display of His glory
4. Paul puts God at the center by explaining WHY Christ came

ESV Romans 15:8 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

- a. In other words, a central reason Christ came was to DISPLAY God's truthfulness
- b. To PROVE that God always tells the truth
- c. God made certain promises to the patriarchs... Christ came to fulfill them
- d. The goal in this verse was to show that God always tells the truth, to confirm it
- e. We always tend to think of human salvation in a human-centered way... it was because God loves US so much, God couldn't live without US, God needed US, WE are the reason
- f. God's reasons were first and foremost God-centered...

Isaiah 48:11 For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

- g. Christ came to prove that God told Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David the truth when He promised a Messiah who would come later
5. Paul also puts God's glory on display when he speaks of WHY the Gentiles were saved:

Romans 15:8-9 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs ⁹ so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy

- a. Christ came to display God's truthfulness... His trustworthiness... a God who always speaks the truth, a God who can be trusted to keep His promises
 - b. Christ saved Jews and Gentiles to display God's mercy... we will both be up in heaven exulting forever and ever in the MERCY of God... His kindness to us in Christ
6. Basically: Human strife and conflict will cease forever in heaven where God's glory takes its rightful place as the center of our existence

B. Remedy #2: Understand God's Second Purpose: Our Eternal, United Delight in His Glory

1. God's ULTIMATE purposes were God-centered
2. God's SECONDARY purposes were human-centered... He LOVES us
3. The greatest measure of love is what it will sacrifice, what it will GIVE to the one it loves
4. God's gifts are lavish
 - a. The greatest gift God could give us is HIMSELF... that we might be overwhelmed eternally by His very presence
 - b. The second greatest gift God could give us is EACH OTHER... especially once we have been perfected, cleansed of all sin, radiant in Christ's righteousness, shining in Christ's glory
 - c. Therefore God is working out a beautiful salvation plan in which racists and bigots and self-worshippers will be saved from their racism and bigotry and self-worship to adore and glorify God
 - d. AND as they do, they find delight in each other as a secondary blessing: people from every tribe and language and people and nation falling on their faces together... perfectly united in one thought: THE GLORY OF GOD
5. So we see HAPPINESS all over these verses... happiness in what God has planned for all of us together:

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." ¹⁰ Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." ¹¹ And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." ¹² And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." ¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Words like:

- a. "Rejoice O Gentiles with His people"
 - b. That is a SHARED joy... a SHARED delight
 - c. Why does God give us each other? Because He loves us!! We will become one of God's wonderful gifts to His children when we are fully
6. The focus is JOYFUL EXUBERANT WORSHIP
 - a. "I will praise you"

- b. "I will sing hymns to your name"
- c. "Praise the Lord all you peoples"
- d. "The Gentiles will hope in him"

The focus is on God's glory... but it is a UNITED expression of worship

- e. Look at the final, exuberant benediction

vs. 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So... the second remedy to Jew-Gentile division is to understand God's wonderful purpose for His elect people: unity in eternal worship in God's presence

C. Remedy #3: Obey God's Command: Accept Each Other Wholeheartedly

- 1. Bookend commands:

Romans 14:1 [Welcome] him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

^{ESV} Romans 15:7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

- 2. Simply put: God commands us to accept one another, to welcome one another
- 3. It is a matter of simple obedience here

John 14:15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

- 4. The word "welcome" here was admirably described by Scott Markley several weeks ago in the book of Philemon... a warm engaging welcome

Philemon 1:17 So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.

- a. It is as little as tone of voice, facial expressions of gladness that says "I love you; I'm glad you're my brother, my sister in Christ"
- b. It's like the Father of the Prodigal Son... running to the end of the path to greet his son, warmly embracing him, calling for a ring for his finger and shoes for his feet
- 5. Paul is commanding obedience from the Jews and Gentiles in the church: GET OVER YOUR BIASES AND LOVE EACH OTHER

D. Remedy #4: Follow Christ's Pattern of Acceptance

ESV **Romans 15:7** *Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

1. Paul answers two questions about Jewish and Gentile Christians acceptance of one another: “AS CHRIST HAS WELCOMED YOU”: WHY? And HOW?
2. Why should we accept one another? Christ is the motive for our acceptance of one another
 - a. How can we refuse to accept someone else if Christ has not refused to accept us?
 - b. We were filthy rebellious sinners, stinking with the pigs in our sin
 - c. Christ embraced us in our rebellion, cured us of it, cleaned us up and introduced us to His heavenly Father
 - d. Why should we embrace other sinners in Christ? Simply put: because of how gracious Christ was to welcome you!!
3. How should we accept one another? In the pattern of Christ! AS warmly and lovingly as Christ forgave and cleansed and loved and welcomed you!

John 6:37 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.*

- Christ welcomed Zacchaeus, who was a thieving tax collector
- Christ welcomed the Roman Centurion whose servant was paralyzed
- Christ welcomed Mary Magdalene, a prostitute from whom he cast seven demons
- Christ welcomed the little children who his own disciples had rebuked
- Christ welcomed the leper who said “If you are willing, you can make me clean”
- Christ welcomed Peter after he’d denied Christ three times
- Christ welcomed the woman of poor reputation who bathed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair
- Christ welcomed the woman who’d been bleeding for twelve years
- Christ welcomed Saul of Tarsus, a self-righteous Pharisee who was breathing out murderous threats against Christ’s disciples
- Christ welcomed anyone the Father brought to Him... He accepted them all gladly as love gifts from the Father

Matthew 11:28 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

4. The pattern of Christ answers WHY and HOW we must welcome each other

E. Remedy #5: Understand Christ's Servanthood "to the Jews First"

1. Christ's ministry to the Jews first is a remedy to Jew-Gentile bickering
2. Christ came as servant to the Jews, though He rightly was their King
3. He didn't carry Himself as a high and lofty potentate, though He could have; but rather He was a humble servant of all
4. BUT in the pattern of God, He was sent to the Jews exclusively in His first coming

[Tyre & Sidon] **Matthew 15:22-24** *A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." ²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."*

5. And what was the manner of Christ's servanthood to the Jews?
 - a. He took up their diseases and healed their iniquities; He bore their sins and carried their sorrows
 - b. He humbly did what no one else could or would do
6. And what was the extent of Christ's servanthood to the Jews? The CROSS

Mark 10:45 *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Philippians 2:8 *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*

That is how far, how infinitely far Christ served the Jewish people... all the way to the cross!

7. Christ's great love to the Jews should remove any Gentile tendency to look down on their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ; it should cause us to revere the Jewish roots of our own faith
8. It also gives us the pattern of how we treat each other: as servants not as Kings

F. Remedy #6: Understand Christ's Commitment to God's Truth

Vs. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs

1. Christ's coming was to display the truthfulness of God, specifically in keeping his promises to the Patriarchs and His prophecies through the Prophets
2. Vindication of the name of God, of the glory of God as a truth-telling God is uppermost in Christ's list of motives
3. As I said earlier, Christ puts a display of the glory of God even above human salvation
4. Had Christ not come to serve the Jews by dying for them on the cross, then all of God's promises in the Old Testament would have been for nothing
5. God would have been a liar, a promise-breaker, completely unworthy of our trust
6. Human beings lie so easily... we have very little regard for the truth
 - a. We speak words and don't mean them
 - b. We make promises and don't keep them
 - c. This is destructive in all human relationships
7. God's unshakeable commitment to the truth is the sure and certain foundation of the church, and of our relationships with each other
8. If God cannot be trusted, then why should we trust any other person
9. BUT if God is truthful, then we have a hope for future truth-filled relationships with each other
10. Christ's powerful display of the truthfulness of God is a sure and certain foundation for Jew-Gentile unity in the church

III. Review and Application: Unity and Joyful Worship of God's Glory

A. Review

1. Problem: Jew-Gentile disunity
2. Paul's Ten Remedies to the Problem of Disunity in the Church
 - **Understand God's Ultimate Purpose: His Own Glory**
 - **Understand God's Second Purpose: Our Delight in His Glory**

- **Obey God's Command: Accept Each Other**
- **Follow Christ's Pattern of Acceptance**
- **Understand Christ's Servanthood to the Jews**
- **Understand Christ's Commitment to God's Truth**
- Believe God's Promises to the Patriarchs
- Glorify God for His Mercy to Both Jews and Gentiles
- Understand the Prophecies of Jew-Gentile Unity
- Hope in Our Glorious Future Together

B. Apply to Your Own Life

1. All problems of disunity are ultimately in view
2. Issues of reconciliation within the church body continue to be paramount
3. It is not only Jew-Gentile unity that Paul has in mind, but perfect unity between all believers as a clear proof to the watching world of the power of the gospel
4. In your marriage and family life, there should be unity... or you must labor at issues until there is

C. Apply to our own Church

1. The church must be a place of open, warm acceptance of people
2. This does not mean acceptance or tolerance of sin, of course
3. But it does mean there must be a humble, glad acceptance of other sinners, even those different than yourselves
4. Set your minds so totally on our future eternity of perfect worship and then pray for it to be mirrored here at FBC
5. Earnestly desire people of other races and nationalities to feel totally and warmly accepted here

D. Meditate Frequently on our Heavenly Future: Full Delight in Worship

E. Live for the Future Glory of God in the Advance of the Church

F. Obey the Happy Commands to Worship God