

How to Keep it Together - Part 1

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[0 : 00] This message will come in two parts, which will sandwich our congregational meeting this coming Wednesday.

I heard a lecture on these passages over a month ago, and I was convicted. So I want you to share my pain. It's all in love.

If I'm going down, you're going down. It was an incredible lecture, and this passage jumped out at me. So in God's providence, it seems to fit right around our congregational meeting.

So amen to that. Let's pray. Father, thank you that there is no one greater than you. And thank you that we know it.

Because, Father, we didn't know it. To be honest, we thought we were great. And then we had people we thought were great. We call some people great. But, Father, they are nothing compared to you.

[1 : 10] The angel, your angel, you sent Gabriel, told Mary that the baby born to her would be great and be called the Son of the Most High.

There is nobody greater. And so, Father, we worship you. Father, Son, Holy Spirit, we worship you in the name of thy Holy Son, Jesus. Oh, God, speak to us now through your word.

You've spoken to us in our songs and singing. Your spirit is present. We believe it. We know it.

You've spoken to us, Lord, in our confession of sin. And you will speak to us again as we come to the table.

But, Lord, right now we ask that you would speak to us in that which you've given us to be a sure word from you and a clear word from you.

So use your servant. Override any of my mistakes. And give me a clear message from this word so that your people will hear from you clearly and because they hear from this word and this passage.

[2 : 18] And may we all sit under your word so that we might be corrected. We might be guided.

We might be strengthened. And that we might see Jesus. His name we pray. Amen. Romans chapter 15.

Our passages we'll be looking at is verses 1 through 7. We'll see how far we get this morning. We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to 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 reproach you fell on me. Now, for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction.

[3 : 19] He's talking about the old covenant. That through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. So may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another and accords with Jesus Christ.

That together, 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.

Amen. That is the word of God. Amen. You may be seated. Thank you. Thank you so much, praise team.

Thank you. For any church to be effective, there has to be certain priorities that are non-negotiable. We don't get to determine such things. God tells us in his word what the priority of his kingdom embassies or churches are.

[4 : 33] And that's true of any embassy. Any embassy around the world. The embassy itself must follow the dictates of the government or country it represents.

It doesn't get to say, now that we're in this region of the world, we should determine what we're going to do. No. That embassy was sent on a mission.

And if they deviate, they will be recalled. We're called. And sometimes, if they deviate bad enough, it's called treason.

In our passage, we see what our priority is. And one of the priorities we must model in order to achieve it.

Simply saying, I just say, Paul is telling us how to keep it together. How to keep the church together for the sake of God's mission. Now, let's set the context up because that's important for this discussion.

[5 : 35] The Roman church was made up of Jews and Gentiles. This is a more serious issue than our ethnic, tribal, national, or political arguments and differences.

But it does have the application to those issues. Okay? Jew and Gentile was not merely a sociological divide. Ethnic or whatever you want to call it.

It was more importantly theological. For the issue is who are and who are not the people of God. The Jews were, as they were faithful, they were the people of God and the Gentiles were not. But the gospel came.

Jesus came. And now, both Jew and Gentile who believe in Jesus are the people of God. We call that today the church.

[6 : 38] It covers everybody around the world who believes in Jesus, no matter if they're Jew or Gentile. If they believe in Christ, submit to Christ, love Christ, honor Christ, then we are one family.

And in Christ, therefore, there is a one kingdom people. And that's our new identity. And that identity takes precedence over all human distinctions, including cultural and ethnic preferences or realities.

Your tribe in which you were born or lesser tribes that you have chosen, political, socioeconomically, whatever. That's important.

But it's no way nearly as important as the tribe into which you have been born again. The tribe of Christ.

The tribe of Christian. The tribe of disciple of Jesus, the Lord of glory. And yet there are still culturally and ethnically issues that actually cause problems in the church.

[8 : 00] And you see it in the scriptures. The New Testament. They have problems. Jew and Gentile coming together had problems. In this case, in our passage, they were arguing over eating certain types of meat.

Likely meat sacrificed to idols. And over special holy days. Now, when it came to meat, some people objected.

Don't eat that meat. That meat is not right. It's not kosher. But the other believers were saying, hold it. I got a pound of that.

It's a good price. I pound of pork, man. I got some pig feed over here. It's cheap. And it's cheap.

And you're telling me I can't eat it? Or maybe it wasn't non-kosher.

It was sacrificed to an idol. And they're saying, hey, idol is nothing. I'm free in Christ. I'm going to eat that. That's cheap meat. That's good meat. What's the problem?

[9 : 06] Paul explains it here in our passage. Paul explains it that there are differences in freedoms in Christ.

And differences of opinions. That we have to make note of. So, therefore, the first thing I want to say to you is allow me to reveal my whole card.

I got to show you where we're going. This is the big issue in this passage, really. It's what the church, first and foremost, is not people-centered. To keep it together, family, to keep New City and wherever church you are together, we must have the right mission.

Now, if I were to ask you, what is the mission of the church? Many people would say, well, quote the Great Commission. They'd say, hey, we got to make disciples of the nations. That's the Great Commission. Now, Jesus didn't call it the Great Commission, but that's our word.

And that's okay. It's a good phrase. Amen. We got to make disciples. We got to go make disciples of the nations. And amen to that. But let me ask you a question. Why?

[10 : 14] Why are we to go and make disciples of the nations? Why? So, the why is the real issue.

The why is right here. Now, I hope you have a Bible because I don't know if they'll put it back up again. But the why, the Great Mission of the church is seen in verse 5 in this passage. And it's beautiful.

Sorry, verse 6. We'll read both. We'll read both. May the God of endurance. He's praying. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Jesus Christ.

Why? That together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 7 even ends the section by saying, for the glory of God. What is the great mission of the church? It's not people.

[11:18] It's not people centered. The great mission that Paul is calling us to. He's telling the Roman Christians that whatever you do and how you do it, this must be the reason, this must be the goal, that Jesus, that God might be glorified.

So the church is God-centered. His first priority is not to make people happy or to cater to people's felt needs and desires.

We can do that to some extent. But that is not the first goal or the purpose of the church. If we get that wrong, if we make people the first priority and first goal, we will end up compromising in order to get them.

Something's got to be higher than that. So we stay on target and we don't compromise.

And we hold the standard of the truth of Christ. Even when people don't like it. In seminary, we had to read this book called Let the Nations Be Glad.

[12:47] It's now a classic. It's by John Piper. It's a classic book on world missions. And I'm going to give you a sizable quote because this hit me so hard, it was worth the price of the book to me.

This truth he shares. He says this. I think it'll be on the screen. I think. I don't know. Missions, he says. Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church.

Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't. People are not worshiping God. That's why we have missions. Right?

Missions exist because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not mission, because God is ultimate, not man.

When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more.

[13:51] It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions.

It is the goal of missions because in missions, we simply aim to bring the nations into the white, hot enjoyment of God's glory.

The goal of missions is the gladness of the people and the greatness of God. Oh, my gosh. When I read that, I was on my face.

Because I had never heard anybody say it like that. I was, the Great Commission was my life. Now, that's a good thing. Don't get me wrong. But there was something higher.

And I didn't know. Psalm 63. Sorry. Psalm 67, verses 3 and 4. Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you.

[14:53] Let the nations be glad and sing for joy. We are told in another passage in the New Testament, Colossians 3, 17.

Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. What's the goal? What's the purpose?

What's the motivation? What's the motivation? Jesus. Giving thanks to the Father. Glorifying God. We even have it in our catechism.

The Westminster Shroder Catechism. We all know it by heart. What is the chief end? Or what is the purpose of humanity? To glorify God.

And to enjoy him forever. It's all about God. Think about the greatest statements in all of Scripture.

[15:51] God is always first. In the beginning, people, Adam and Eve were in the garden. In the beginning, God created. God.

The Ten Commandments. What are the first four commandments? It's all about God. Worship him alone.

Don't make any images of him. It's all about God. We don't get to us down to honor your father and mother.

That's when we get to us. But everything else before that is about God. The Lord's Prayer. What are the first? How do we begin the Lord's Prayer?

Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us. No. Father. Hallowed. Holy be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.

[16:52] And oh, Father. Don't forget us. Give us this day. The Great Commission. I just told you. But I didn't start at the beginning.

The beginning of the Great Commission is not make disciples. Go and make disciples. Or as you are going, make disciples. That's not the beginning. It's the verse before that. Jesus speaking said this.

All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to me. Now go. That makes a difference, family. Understanding the priority makes a huge difference in the Christian life.

Now get this straight. It makes a huge difference in the church. What is the chief end of the church? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

That's why we're here. Family. That's why New City Fellowship exists. The Son.

[17:52] We saw this in John. See this in John all the time. The Son came, the glorified Father. It is in the gospel that we see the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. I'm quoting from 2 Corinthians chapter 4, by the way.

God opens our eyes to see and believe the good news of God's forgiveness of us in Jesus. And forgiveness for us personally and corporately.

Because we're in this together. A lot of our songs talk about I, I, I. We got to sing more songs that say we. He then fills us with His glorious, loving, empowering presence by the Spirit.

So that we spend the rest of our lives growing in this. Seeing, pursuing, reflecting, and revealing the glory of Christ in us to others.

That's why in this passage, if you have your Bible in front of me, down in verses 8 and 9. I didn't read those because they're not really part of the, where I want to spend my time. But I just want to make the point here. That Christ came to serve in order that, verse 9, the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.

[19:13] As it is written, therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing your name. Jesus came because there was a people group that was the rest of the world outside of Israel.

That means everybody who was not of Jewish descent. That's a lot of folk, y'all. He came that the Gentiles might hear His gospel, might hear of Him.

And live for the glory of God. Because of God's mercy to us. Glorify God for His mercy.

I'm going, I'm going to see this. I'm taking my time here, so, because I want you to get this straight. Practically speaking, How should we as individuals, but even more as a church, respond to God's mercy in order to glorify Him?

How should we respond? I'm saying in Romans. You notice verse, chapter 12, verse 1. How to respond to the mercies.

[20:29] As an individual, as a church. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God. To present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. How? Practically speaking.

Are we as a body, and I'm talking about body individually, as a body, because He says glorify Him together. How? Should we respond to the mercies of God together?

Together. We come before the altar of God. And get up on it. Just as they would take animals, and lay them on the altar, and sacrifice that animal.

God says, I don't want dead sacrifices from you. I want living. So I want you all to get up on the altar together. Because of my mercy.

[21:39] That's plural, by the way. Mercies. Because of His manifold mercies. Because of how good God has been. And you didn't deserve it or own it. He had pity upon us together.

And He says, now together, get up on the altar. Help each other up on the altar. Together.

Together. And I ain't going to kill you. I want you alive.

So that you can give yourself to me. Together. Together. Together. Wow. Wow. That means I'm up on the altar with everything I got.

Up on the altar. when we together give, present ourselves to God as living sacrifices, getting up on the altar means I bring everything with me.

The totality of my being. Everything you got, everything I got, we get up on the altar together. That means I'm bringing my wallet with me. It's on the altar too.

[22 : 45] My children, we're all on the altar together. I'm bringing everything. My house, my job, we are all bringing everything to present our bodies to God because of His miraculous great mercy.

He looked upon us with pity and said, I will not let them die. I will not let them perish eternally. I will do something to save them. And because we've experienced that individually and together, we get up on the altar.

Hallelujah. Because back to chapter 15, verse 6, that gives us the great purpose and mission says, I want to emphasize it again, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father. Do you see that? Together and one voice unified. He's emphasizing it so that the church understands we can't do it well unless that's said of us that we are together and have one voice. And the wonderful thing about that is we're all different. God but somehow God brings us together so that in our differences we are still together and have one voice.

[24 : 30] How is that possible? Because we're in one kingdom and we have one king. I said it was going to take a minute so you see if this is our life if we've experienced those mercies this is doable.

We have no excuse for not seeing it a reality in our church in our lives. But there's something there that has to be worked out.

Next thing I want to tell you it is to keep it together we have to acknowledge with humility that there are differences in opinion and spiritual maturity. We have to acknowledge those things with humility. And that doesn't mean you think you're the most mature. It just says that you have to acknowledge that. Remember in chapter 14 Paul began to speak of the strong and the weak believers in the church.

And that goes back to what I said before. Jew and Gentile were having a row. In reference to the weak he says in 14 verse 1 as for the one who is weak in faith welcome him but not to quarrel over opinions.

[25 : 47] In reference to both of them 14 3 let not the one who eats that meat I told you about despise the one who abstains and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats for God has welcomed him.

The strong or mature whom Paul identifies with by the way he identifies himself with the strong are not to diss the weak or quarrel over secondary issues which he calls opinions.

In their case it was over diet and special holidays. We are to acknowledge therefore that we all have different opinions regarding Christian freedoms.

Some of those freedoms are clearly regulated by God's word. We gotta agree on that. But some of them because of personal background personality ethnically or culturally you may not engage in something because of your conscience about those things.

There are differences. Some Christians refuse to drink alcohol. Why others see that as a freedom seen in scriptures? We should not attack each other about that. Those who drink should not look down on those who do not.

[27 : 03] If you believe the scriptures support your position then bear with your family and Christ whom you might see you may not be always true but you might see them as a weaker on this particular issue.

Because some issues in the body are about spiritual maturity. Personally as a young believer I'll never forget it I came to Christ was it 1980 81 or so 81 just before just before Easter and I remember that particular church told me that secular music was evil and bad that means if it wasn't Christian music it was bad especially that rock and roll and R&B; stuff and even in those days rap had come out rap came out that was I invented rap okay just so you know that was my crew Philly and New York Philly and New York man we we got it going California caught up later but we had it going in Philly and New York including break dancing by the way anyway so I had all this EWF earth wind and fire gap band commodores queen pat benatar and all these and etc and they all went in the trash help me but as I matured in Christ

I began to realize that I was free to listen to such music and to appreciate the artistry and the rhythms of such music but as I grew in maturity in Christ I had to I started choosing carefully about what I put in my mind I learned to be a bit more critical listen to the words and heard things that I didn't hear before the stuff I heard from Billy Joel or from Rick James some of that stuff it was underage girls they were talking about I began to be more critical so I had to be careful but I was free to enjoy but listen I could not look down on my fellow Pentecostal brothers and sisters who felt it was still evil and I couldn't and I couldn't think of myself as more mature more superior to them

either and I couldn't flaunt my freedom they come over my house and I put on the gap band burn rubber on me baby

I couldn't do that I couldn't flaunt my freedom this is what Paul was talking about y'all the strong you can't flaunt if you have a freedom that's between you and Jesus and don't put it in your brother and sister's face see today the church spends too much time arguing over Israel and the Palestinians we spend too much time arguing when Jesus is coming back let's all agree he's coming back if you don't believe that now you're in trouble we spend so much time arguing I gotta go there I'm sorry I gotta go there over our political positions and candidates we even spend a lot of time arguing with each other over what it means to be pro-life when President Jimmy Carter passed away he was the president from I think 77 to 81 yes I was alive then and he had a position on pro-life

Jimmy Carter did not believe abortion should be done he didn't believe it but he believed the states should make the choice so when he passed away on the blogosphere on the internet people were saying Jimmy Carter's in hell Christians were saying Jimmy Carter's in hell because of that position so they made abortion the issue that determines your salvation your view on abortion and again the man did not believe it should happen but he didn't agree isn't it funny that what he what he what he believed is now what we have ain't that funny I wish it was done altogether never anywhere but I would not judge Carter's Christianity or salvation based upon that issue we argue over secondary issues and you can put full in the blank you know some of them and we judge one another's faith and one another's maturity in Christ based upon whether you agree with me yet none of those things are essential to the gospel who his was essential who is Jesus what did Jesus accomplish in his life death resurrection and ascension how do you connect with that is it by works or by grace through faith that's the essential it's called the gospel and Paul is telling us that the first priority and how we keep the church together to use the words of our Lord himself is simply this seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness that's how we keep the church together and we give each other freedom to disagree on secondary and tertiary issues well

[32 : 55] I gotta I'm just gonna give you a quick blurb and then we're gonna wrap this up because I gotta say this to keep it together we have to ask one simple question who are we trying to please that is one of the great problems in the church throughout the world and especially here who are you trying to please it's such a it causes so much hardship and division today because too often we want to please ourselves supremely and that's not what the scriptures teach bear you have an obligation to the strong to bear with the feelings of the weak listen and not please ourselves then he says let each of you each of us please his neighbor for his good to build him up stop making the goal to please yourself and now seek to please your neighbor now he's talking about in the church in particular

I'm not saying it doesn't have anything to do with the world I'm just saying first of all he's talking about in the church that's the context and so too often we want to please our neighbors ourselves supremely and not our neighbor it's our way or the highway the word please means to accommodate oneself to the opinions desires and interests of others accommodate to give satisfaction to please to accommodate that's the idea first we are not to please ourselves to accommodate or satisfy yourself above others is sinful and the problem we do this in many ways my favorite ministry must be prominent in the church we gotta sing my songs that's not my favorite type of song we gotta sing my songs what we don't have we don't we're not gonna do that we gotta do that whatever that is because

I want my happiness and peace in my church so y'all gotta do what I want and how I like it etc see that's to forget that we're the body of Christ not the one arm of Christ but the body of Christ God and like every human body this spiritual body has different members who are gifted to do different things and have certain different priorities within the mission for the sake of the body 1 Corinthians 12 4 and 7 Paul wrote that too he says now there are varieties of gifts but the same spirit varieties of gifts same spirit and there are varieties of service but the same Lord there are varieties of activities but it's the same God who empowers them all in everyone to each is given each one of us the manifestation of the spirit to make you feel good about yourself that's why

God gave you gifts and spiritual gifts and talents and resources so you can feel good about you you can you know brother are you feeling me man I got two daryls in here brother daryls that thing is very cool one is black one is white that's so cool that's new city it's all about you know my spiritual gift of singing is so I can sing and y'all tell me how wonderful I am and make me feel good about me and I'm going to sing sing because you know I want you to think I'm great no that's what the

text says I know he gives us these gifts the text says to each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good the common good so whatever gifts you have are for me whatever gifts I have they're for you Nate they're for you Mindy what the gifts

Dan has and Kathy has well they're for Glinda they're for Alvin and Margaret we're not living for ourselves anymore we did that already it's called being dead in sin we did that but now we're alive in Christ and my goal is not to please myself now this doesn't mean you don't care about yourself so don't get crazy don't go don't go there I ain't saying that but the first priority within the body of Christ that I seek to bless my brothers and sisters and if we all do that by the way we all get built up nobody gets left out is when we refuse we make what we want the priority of the church gotta be this way the church splits division happens and the church is hurt

[38 : 40] Christians are hurt because we insist on pleasing ourselves well I'm gonna end here because we got communion so just gonna talk hit it and then move on and we'll go to communion he says then that Christ did not please himself that's what he said that's all he says boom and he explains a little bit that's the that's the point why should we seek to please others in the body and not please ourselves first because that's what our savior did and watch this he's more than an example because he is our example he is our example but why but what did he do in not pleasing himself he died for us he gave himself to death and to the wrath of God that you might no longer live for yourself but for him have you experienced a new birth of Jesus have you really experienced a new birth because that's your testimony if it is but I will offer one more example and he's a little bit controversial at times because today we know more things but

I tell you the example he set is something we all need to hear talk about Dr. King I know there's things about Dr.

King's life that we want to wish that were not there amen there are things in your life that I wish were not there and there things in my life that you said man Kevin if you just got rid of that you I'm not making excuses I'm just saying we're all in the same boat to some extent but in in fight of those failings by God's grace God used them to do so much good for all Americans especially African Americans and he illustrates this passage so profoundly the night before he was assassinated you remember you know this story what did that speech he gave remember the mountaintop speech remember that like anybody I would like to live a long life he knew something was coming down longevity has its place but I'm not concerned about that now

I just want to do God's will and he's allowed me to go up to the mountain I've looked over and I've seen the promised land I may not get there with you but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land he knew he was going to die and he chose not to please himself but to please his neighbors and die that was prescient spirit of God must I believe spoke to his heart and says you're not going to see Moses you're not going to see you know me sometimes sometimes guys we don't see it but we can work and labor so that our family sees it to our neighbors see it he followed his savior in that regard for

Jesus did not please himself but gave himself that he might save a ragtag group of people like us and call us brothers and sisters and be part of God's family who are you trying to please father help us for as a church lord we're just we're susceptible just as the Roman church was we are susceptible to the same issues and same problems different names we're not arguing about meat and holy days but you know what we argue things we argue about lord forgive us and help us to allow each other to disagree on secondary issues father so that we might agree on the most than the great issue of glorifying your great name through your holy son our lord Jesus and making him known oh God help us to agree on that and to give ourselves to that and to present our bodies to you so that you can use us to glorify your great name to make your name glorious that all the earth might see our

[43 : 36] God reigns that there's one kingdom that's above all kingdoms and one king that's above all kings help us to give ourselves to that in Jesus name amen some more on that passage we'll get to it hopefully next week elders will you come down front so we can serve our family