TOGETHER GLORIFY GOD

Romans 15:1-13

Key Verse: 5-6

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Happy New Year, 2023! Thank God for giving us this new year. Days, months and years belong to him. He is the God of time. Time is the same as life. Again, thank God for granting us this precious time of 2023. In this year, our UBF direction is based on Romans 15:1-13, “Together with one voice glorify God.” This passage is the final part of the epistle of Romans since 15:14 to the end of chapter 16 is like a postscript. additions. 15:1-13 is about the unity of the church, and that theme started from chapter 14. The unity of the church is the concern of God the Father and our Lord Christ Jesus. This is well expressed in the Lord Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17:21 that all believers may be one through complete unity in Christ. Jesus said in John 10:16, “…there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” Here in Romans 15 as Paul reaches the climax of this great epistle, he prays that Jews and Gentiles, the strong and the weak, all believers may glorify God together with one heart and one mouth. The unity of the redeemed is indeed the purpose of God.  And that purpose, ultimately finds its consummation in eternal glory, and we are reminded in Revelation 21:1-4. There in that eternal glory, all people are brought together under the kingship of God forever and ever. This hope of God for all his people is also related to Daniel’s vision of the coronation of Christ and his eternal kingdom and the saints’ reception and possession of the kingdom forever. May God richly bless this direction in 2023.

Paul says in verse 1, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.” In the context of chapter 14, the strong are those who enjoy liberty in Christ not being bound by dietary, ceremonial, or Sabbath laws in the Old Testament since Christ made them free, while the weak are concerned about those things. For the most part, we see in chapter 14, a Gentile equals strong issue, and a Jew equals weak issue in the church in Rome. And the conflict came because the liberated Gentiles wanted to exercise all their freedoms and the Jews wanted to confine everybody to the Old Testament traditions. One thing is clear that the weak can grow to enjoy liberty in Christ more and more as they are well helped and supported. Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:1, “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” So we can say that the strong are those who are in the grace of Christ Jesus and humbly depend on him. It is to bear with the failings of the weak, the failings of anyone? Here “failings” is in other translations “infirmities.” Yet, how easy it is to be indifferent from or even despise or condemn the weaknesses, infirmities or failings of others! The strong are truly the strong as they bear the failings of the weak. Here “to bear” is more than “to tolerate.” While to tolerate has a negative connotation, to bear is a positive implication. It means to get under and carry the load, shouldering a burden. And “ought to” conveys the meaning to be a debtor. Paul says in Galatians 6:1-2, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” We believe that the law of Christ is love. And Romans 12:8 says, “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.” The debt of love is never paid fully. We will always owe it no matter how much we pay on it.

In verse 1, Paul continues, “not to please ourselves.” Because self-pleasing or self-love we cannot love God and we cannot truly help others. Then Paul says in verse 2, “Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.” It is not to sacrifice God’s truth for the sake of harmony. It is to seek to build the weak by setting apart our own liberty for the sake of strengthening them. In this, we need to be sure that we do not please our neighbour by just satisfying their feelings, but we are carefully and cautiously to do what pleases them for their good to build them up. Paul says to Philippians believers in concerning Timothy, “I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 2:20-21). When we look out for the interests of Jesus Christ, we can serve for the good of others with a genuine interest to build them up.

Then Paul says in verse 3, “For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.’” This is a quotation from Psalm 69, a messianic Psalm. In order to please God, not to himself, Christ received insults/reproach. That is slander and false accusation. He suffered the same insults God suffered because he represented God and revealed God and his holiness.  In order to please God, he prayed at Gethsemane, “Not my will, but yours be done.” Finally, he died on the cross on our behalf, praying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” 1 Peter 2:24 says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” What healing and restoration from poisonous sin and its terrible consequences he has brought through his affliction on the cross! In sin, people wound others and they are wounded, and behind such wounding is Satan. What a grace it is that we can receive healing and restoration again by coming to the cross of Jesus, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

In the gospel story, it is really beautiful to see how Jesus bore the infirmities and failing of the weak. Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand risking his life, helping him to stand on the side of Jesus clearly, while he had no compromising spirit toward the malicious religious and political leaders. After this event, Matthew wrote, quoting the words of Isaiah, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.” (Mt 12:20-21; Isaiah 42:3-4)

After using the Old Testament Psalm to show the example of Christ, Paul gives the value of the Scripture. Old Testament scripture was written for New Testament people. It is a book that is written for our learning. Paul says in verse 4 says, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” How much we are thankful for the Scriptures that inspire us to receive endurance and encouragement! The story of Abraham who finally bore the fruit of faith, Isaac, through his unwavering faith in the promise of God to him; the story of David, who confessed, “The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge…He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me” (2 Samuel 22:2, 3, 18) and the story of Daniel, who prayed together with his friends and also prayed personally three times a day as usual and overcame the power of the world empires of his era. As for us we even have the New Testament. We had thought of Jesus in the gospel story. Jesus also said, “Have faith in God,” and “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” The author of Hebrews says that our weakness can be turned to strength by faith (Heb 11:34), and we are to endure hardship as discipline and no discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful, however later on it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” In the book of James he says to the scattered suffering Christians to consider trials of many kinds pure joy, for the testing of faith develops perseverance and makes us mature and complete (James 1:2-3). Through the Scriptures God gives us endurance and encouragement so we might have hope. When we have hope, we can bear any hardship and any difficult life situation. What kind of hope do we have? The hope of spiritual growth to maturity and the weak becoming the strong, the hope of our children knowing Christ and be his fully dedicated servants in our time, the hope of redemption of our bodies, and the hope of Jesus’ coming with the clouds of heaven and the saints receiving and possessing the eternal kingdom of Christ. Hebrews 6:19 says, “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” Once we were without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 3:12). Now we have hope at each time, the hope of God in Christ Jesus. God is the God of hope. Paul's point here is that we receive endurance and encouragement and hope from the words of the Scriptures.

Then Paul prays in verses 5-6, “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ, so that with one heart and one mouth you may glorify the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is truly beautiful to follow Christ together, certainly each one having a personal faith. Paul says in Ephesians 4-6 that for all believers there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God. In this oneness we can be likeminded resembling Christ. That is the spirit of unity. We need to pray for this as Paul prayed. Paul says in Ephesians 4:2, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.” So our unity is unity in the Spirit.

And here, Paul shows God’s ultimate purpose for the redeemed of all Christian community. That is with one heart and one mouth to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Genesis, we see that God’s creation purpose was for the glory of God. All the creation reveals God’s glory. According to the Shorter Westminster catechism, man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” The purpose of sinners being created in Christ Jesus anew is for the glory of God (Eph 1:5) that the manifold wisdom of God being made known in heaven and on earth through the church, the body of Christ, who is the head (Eph 3:10-11). Here Paul says, “with one hear and one mouth they may glorify God.” So here, glorifying God is to be from the heart internally and also with one voice externally. It includes rejoicing and praising God, singing hymns to him. How lovely it is for a husband and a wife, parents and children, singing praises and hymns to God together in one spirit, even with musical instruments! Also how beautiful is for the community of the redeemed to praise and glorify God with one heart and one voice despite differences! While glorifying God with the spirit of rejoicing and praising him for the glory of God, trivial differences can be melted and gone. In Revelation 19, we hear “Hallelujah” in the heavenly chorus with the heavenly orchestra, “Amen, hallelujah…Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great…Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!” (Revelation 19:4-6).

Here we are to notice that Paul says specifically, “…glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This God is the God of Christianity, different from the God of all other religions. This expression is written 4 times in the New Testament. Paul also said in 2 Corinthians 1:3, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort”, and in Ephesians 1:3, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Apostle Peter also said in 1 Peter 1:3, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Jesus said in John 17:3, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” This is the God who sent his Son called Jesus into this world. He is the God who created the heavens and the earth and is the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only true God. This God we believe. Jesus clearly said in John 14:6, “…No one comes to the Father except through me.” There is no compromise in this, whatsoever, “…glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The theme of the 2023 ISBC is “His Glory.” We want to glorify God together, seeing his glory personally and collectively, meditating on his coming in flesh, his death on the cross, his resurrection and the gloried Christ Jesus and his coming again. We may pray for this more intensely as we prepare for this conference.

I really wondered how we could glorify God through our Christmas worship service, when all the flights to Toronto were cancelled, which meant that S. Daniel from Winnipeg and Joshua from Sao Paulo, Brazil would not be able to come because of the snowstorm. However, we all could see the glory of God as we celebrated the birth of the baby Jesus, the best gift of God through S. Daniel’s wonderful Christmas message delivered through Zoom and beautiful music, a surprising Taekwondo performance, the participation of Sophie and Terry in-person, generous offerings to God and joyful lunch fellowship. We were so encouraged seeing the glory of God at our Christmas worship, which was the last Sunday worship service of the past year. I also could see the glory of God behind the scenes. After our Christmas worship, S. Daniel shared his Christ message which included Jesus’ Second coming in his family Christmas gathering, which was a surprising message to them. Also, I heard that S. Joshua Park was served well by Montreal shepherds and that he had a very graceful time with young people there, especially the second gens wanted to hear about life of faith and marriage by faith. We also heard the good news that God gave S. Ian finally got a proper job after around a year of his hard struggle by faith after receiving humility training from God. He will begin to work on January 3rd. Thank God for these glories of God.

After Jesus’ ascension, the gospel work could have been difficult with the powerful enemies of Christ. However, the gospel work was more powerful revealing the glory of God through the coming of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit filling the hearts of the believers. When people wondered about the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, Peter explained it based on the words of the Scriptures, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.” (Ac 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29). Through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit the church of Christ Jesus was born. The fellowship was well described in Acts 2:42-47: They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God ad enjoying favour of all people.” Thank God for the vessel of the Holy Spirit among us. We want to see such glory of God together as we hold to Acts 1:8, the last words of Jesus on the earth before his ascension, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses…” This promise and command of Jesus be true to us as we serve the Lord in our time.

Here Paul says continually, “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Thank God that Christ accepted us sinners, while unloved and wretched as enemies of God, when we came to him humbly as we were. May we also learn such acceptance. It is for/to the glory of God, bringing praise to him.

Paul continues, “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 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.” Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world as a Jew and was circumcised as a child and identified in a true way with the sign of the covenant which was physical circumcision. He lived under the law and fulfilled the law by completely living by it. And he died on the cross and ended the law for us. His life seemed to be confined and limited, but fulfilled all the laws and promises of God especially promises made to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He testified to the truth and truthfulness of God. So the Jews would glorify God for the truth of God confirmed in Christ Jesus, but the Gentiles would glorify and praise God for his mercy, that God’s salvation came to them. Certainly, the Jews are thankful for mercy and certainly the Gentiles are thankful for truth.  But the emphasis here is that Christ came to show to the Jews the truth of God and He came to show to the Gentiles the mercy of God. The Jews and the Gentiles are blended together and glorify God together.

God’s salvation work includes the Gentiles. Paul supports this wonderful plan of God from the Old Testament with four OT quotes. Paul says, “as it is written.” The first quotation is from Samuel 22:50 and Psalm 18:49, which are the same, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.” Here David is singing the praise of God among the nations, an allusion to Gentile salvation. The next quotation is, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” Now the Gentiles are to rejoice together with the Jews. This command for Gentiles to join in offering praise along with the Jews is written even in the Pentateuch of Moses (Dt 32:43), the first set of books in the Old Testament. The following quotation is “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.” Now the command is that the Gentiles praise the Lord alone singing praise to him. What a development! This is a quotation from Psalm 117:1. And the final quotation is this, “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him” from Isaiah 11:1, 10, “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse”, “And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.” (NKJV). God’s plan of salvation is really wonderful inclusive of both the Jews and Gentiles. He shows his mercy to those who fear him. Psalm 103:17 says, “From everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him…” And Mary said in her song, Luke 1:50, “His mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation.” At the beginning of Romans Paul says in 1:5, “…to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith” and he says at the end, in 16:26, “…all nations might believe and obey him.” Paul indeed was concerned about the Jews and the Gentiles throughout this epistle of Romans to be one in believing and obeying him. This is God’s plan.

Finally, Paul says in verse 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.” This was Paul’s prayer as the final words of Romans except the postscript. What a beautiful and hopeful and great prayer!

Thank God that our God is the God of hope. May we be filled with joy, peace and hope by the power of the Holy Spirit and glorify God together with one heart and voice following Christ in this new year of 2023!