

42. Glorifying God by loving others

March 1, 2009

What would you do if you knew you only had 24 hours to live from one o'clock this afternoon until one o'clock tomorrow afternoon? Would you run up your credit cards to maximum by getting all the things you've been wanting to have and do? Or would you spend your last 24 hours on this earth with the people whom you love most and get your life in order as well as letting others know about your Savior Jesus?

Unfortunately – or perhaps, fortunately – we don't know when we are going to kick the bucket. However, being God Himself, Jesus knew exactly when He would die. During Jesus' final 24 hours before His death, He spent His time with the ones whom He loved – His disciples and the Father in Heaven through His prayer. We can see it in His prayer.

John 17:20-21 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

What was He praying for? He was praying for the unity amongst His followers. Not only for His own eleven disciples, but also those who will believe in Him through their word – that means us today.

Are we making Jesus' prayer come true? I am afraid not. We often spend our precious time arguing with each other just like the disciples did before the death of Jesus Christ. We chuckle at their bickering – wanting to be the greatest among them, but if the truth be known, we are not much different than them.

A. EDIFYING OTHERS JUST LIKE JESUS

Romans 15:1-4 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." 4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

True Christian love is not selfish. Rather it seeks to share with others and make others blessed whether it is in an individual marriage or a relationship within a family or the people around each Christian.

It is even willing to carry the younger and immature Christians' difficulties, to help them along in their spiritual development. The definition of Greek word 'bear' is not just putting up with others, rather building them up.

In chapter 14, we learned that we should be willing to give up our liberty for the sake of weaker believers in the Lord. Apostle Paul is carrying the same theme and expounding it more in-depth here.

Of course, the greatest example of this is our Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself up for the sinners like us. There is no other person in the world we should model after when it comes to loving others than Jesus. Though they might be godly and great people, they are still fallible sinners who have selfish tendencies.

V3 and 4 remind me another verses:

Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Even if a mature Christian makes a great sacrifice by giving up some food or drink or movies or whatever you fill in the blanks, can they be compared with what the Lord Jesus did on the cross? No, thousand times no.

A personal spiritual maturity is revealed by a person's willingness and desire to love others. He does this, not as a burden, but as a blessing to others. Just as loving parents make sacrifices for their children, so the mature believer sacrifices themselves and their desires to help younger Christians grow in the faith.

Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 69:9 in v3 and in v4 he briefly mentions about the nature and purpose of the Old Testament scriptures in three ways:

1) The Old Testament teaches us.

Just as Paul drew principles of truth from the ancient Scriptures, so we, too, can look to them for guidance.

2) The Old Testament encourages us.

- God's attributes and character constantly remind us in whom our hope is based.
- The biographies of the followers of God, like Abraham, Joseph, Samuel, David, Josiah, Daniel, Elijah, Elisha and so on, who overcame great obstacles give us examples of what can be done with God's help.
- The direct exhortation of Scripture calls for endurance and speaks encouragement.

3) The Old Testament gives hope.

God has promised a wonderful future for us, and the Old Testament – especially the Prophets – underlines, highlights, and illustrates that promise.

When we respond rightly to the reproaches the world throws at us for our Lord's sake, it bothers them even more. It makes them know there isn't anything they can do against a child of God whose eyes are really on Jesus.

B. UNITY IN THE BELIEVERS OF CHRIST

Romans 15:5-7 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

Our God is a God of patience. We are often in so much of a hurry, and God often seems to work too slowly for us. Often the purposes of God seem to be delayed but they always are fulfilled. God's delays are not His denials, and He has a loving purpose in every delay.

Let's be honest. It is so easy to tell others about God's patience and His timing which does not sync with their time. But it is extremely frustrating to be patient with God's timeline when it comes down to our own situation. It is a good thing that the Lord is not only patient in His timing, but also with us.

Apostle Paul does not intend for us to be united without any individual difference. There were and will be some people who will say, "We need to set aside our difference of doctrines and unite our hearts together for the cause of Christ." I agree and don't have a problem with that.

However, I must put a limitation in that idea. I would only unite my heart and strength with those who are in Christ – born-again Christian churches that uphold the Bible and the Apostles' Creed. I and our church will not unite, even associate with those claim to be Christians yet would not obey and follow what the Bible says. They are the ones who have a form of godliness but denying its power. I don't care what their denomination head honchos decide or vote. But I do care very much what the Lord says in His Word the Bible.

Disunity and disagreement within the ranks of believers of Jesus Christ do not glorify God. They rob Him of glory. We need to receive one another; edify one another; and bless one another – all to the glory of God.

C. THE EXAMPLE OF GOD'S SON

Romans 15:8-13 Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, 9 and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name." 10 And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" 11 And again: "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" 12 And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope." 13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The supreme example of ministry must always be Jesus Christ. He came first of all to minister to the Jews, that through Israel He might be able to minister to the Gentiles. "To the Jew first" is a principle that was followed in the earthly ministry of Christ and in the early ministry of the church.

After His resurrection, He commanded the Apostles to remain in Jerusalem and begin their ministry there. The period covered by Acts 1-7 is characterized by a ministry only to Jews or Jewish converts. It was not until Acts 8 that the Gospel went to the Samaritans. In Acts 10 it finally went to the Gentiles. Then, through the ministry of Paul, it went throughout the Roman Empire.

The inclusion of the Gentiles into God's plan of salvation would have been offensive to Jewish mindsets, so Paul quotes from four passages in the Old Testament to prove his point. Because the Jewish idea of bringing the Gentiles into praise of God of Israel was conquering them with raw power, not with the love of God. They would be the occupants of the Gentile lands and the Gentiles would be their subjects and slaves and be forced to worship the God of Israel.

This was the precise reason why the Pharisees and the rest of the legalistic Jews didn't see Jesus as their Messiah when He came to them. They were expecting a conquering king who would destroy the power of Rome and make them to be a powerful nation.

But the heart of God was much different than that. Look at a beautiful progression in the promises that Paul quoted in v9-12:

1) The Jews glorify God among the Gentiles – v9, quoting Ps. 18:49

It describes the ministry of Paul as he witnessed among the Gentiles in Acts 10-14.

2) The Gentiles rejoice with the Jews – v10, quoting Deut. 32:43

This could be applied to the church council in Acts 15 when the Gentiles were given equal status "with His people."

3) All the Jews and Gentiles together praise God – v11, quoting Ps. 117:1

Today, Jews and Gentiles in the church are praising God together.

4) Christ shall reign over Jews and Gentiles – v12, quoting Isa. 11:10

This will happen during the Millennium period and throughout eternity.

Our Lord is the "God of hope." Isn't that great? God not only wants to give us joy and peace, but He also longs to give us abounding hope – hope that we can live as one and display to the world His unlimited love and power.

We may fear that the communities of Christians are splintered beyond hope of repair. Humanly speaking, that's probably right. But for our God of hope, nothing is impossible. With the power of His Spirit, we can start building bridges of unity today.

D. APPLICATION

We need to receive one another; edify one another; and bless one another – all to the glory of God.

E. YOUR BUCKET LIST

When you came to the church, you received a piece of paper that is numbered 1 through 10. I want all of you to go home and think about what we've learned today and write down 10 things you would do if you only have 24 hours to live. But do it honestly. This is not to show off. It is between you and God. God already knows what your heart is like. It is actually for you to know what you are like. If you do it honestly, it probably reflects your spiritual condition. You can call it your own "Bucket List".

You may say, "Alright, that was cute. But I am gonna live much longer than 24 hours." Oh, really? How do you know? Do you have an absolute assurance from God Himself that you would live longer than 24 hours? Any of you? None of us do.

If you know that you are going to be in heaven because you are a born-again Christian and you only have 24 hours to live on this earth, your attitude and outlook for the rest of the remaining hours would be much different than what you have now. You would be more concerned about being right with God and being with your loved ones. I am sure that you would talk about knowing Jesus as the Lord and Savior to others with passion in your heart and voice.

But if you are not a born-again Christian, enjoy what you have now. Because you will be in torment in hell for the eternal life by your own choice of rejecting Jesus as your Savior and Lord. However, Jesus our God doesn't want you to be in hell. That is why He came to earth to die for our sins so that we may have eternal life in Him. Nobody is too bad that He cannot save, nobody is too good that he doesn't need Jesus to get to heaven. There is only one way to get to heaven, that is through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

He will forgive your sins, remove your guilt, give you new life in Him that you may have true peace, joy and hope that we learned today.