

The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, gives us such a grand image of the church that we wonder if we have completely lost something (Ephesians 3:10). Yet, when we look at the problems of the early church, we can see that there is little difference between the church then and now. We have the same compromises, divisions, factions, and lack of love. But we also have the same victories, sacrifice, joy, and miraculous life transformations. The church is made up of people who sometimes walk in the Spirit and sometimes in the flesh (Galatians 5:17). The wheat and the weeds exist together within the church (Matthew 13:30). As the Romans read this letter, they must have felt similar to how we feel today. This high calling that the Spirit set before them sounds unattainable. However, we know that with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). As we go over these verses, know that they were not written for someone else, but rather for us. It is not some idealistic goal that only the spiritually elite can attain. It is the Spirit filled life.

Paul continues with the theme that we addressed in the end of Romans chapter 14. In Christ, we are free from the bondage of the law, but we are also free to limit our freedoms for the sake of others. We are free to love with the love of Christ. We are free from the bondage of selfishness. The power of the indwelling Spirit enables us to live our life in obedience to God (Philippians 2:13). That is the only way that we can live this first verse. ¹ *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.* The "strong" are the mature in Christ. They have died to themselves and realized the life of Christ in them (Galatians 2:20). They rely on His strength and not their own. If their freedom would cause a weaker brother to stumble, they set it aside. If the weaker brother or sister is not yet able to understand something, the strong will be patient and gentle with them until they are able.

This is radically different from the way that the world operates. Our old nature seeks to please itself in everything. Only the love of Christ can put others first. New or weak believers are still learning to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). To be impatient with them or push when they are not ready will not help them mature. The love of Christ in us obligates us to bear with the failings of the weak. We do so gladly, knowing that others have been patient and gentle with us when we were young in Christ. Consider how patient the Lord is with us all.

² *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.* Remember that in the parable of the Good Samaritan the Lord taught us that our neighbors are those in need with whom we come in contact (Luke 10:36-37). The world is more concerned about their neighbors not bothering them. We are to be more concerned about how we can

Commented [notes1]: Ephesians 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Commented [notes2]: Galatians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Commented [notes3]: Matthew 13:30 (ESV)

³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

Commented [notes4]: Matthew 19:26 (ESV)

²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Commented [notes5]: Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Commented [notes6]: Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Commented [notes7]: Galatians 5:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Commented [notes8]: Luke 10:36-37 (ESV)

³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy". And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

please them for their good. Many of you have been wonderful examples of this. Of course we'd love to see that neighbor come to Christ, but we love them regardless of their response. Someone recently reminded me of the five Gospels. I believe it was Billy Sunday that said, "There is Matthew Mark Luke, John and you; and most people don't read the first four." We know that the Spirit of God is working on their heart, but a living demonstration of love can help them see that it is true (1Peter 2:12).

³ For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." Paul quotes Psalm 69:9 to remind us that Jesus set the example for us. Think for a moment how different the life of Christ would have been had He lived to please Himself. He could have accepted the rule of the entire planet when Satan tempted Him (Matthew 4:8-9). Jesus could have had anything and everything the world could offer, but love for the Father and mankind caused Him to bear our reproach instead. It was a decision that He made every day. He rose before dawn to be with His Father (Mark 1:35). He knew that the best way to demonstrate His love for the Father and for mankind was to be obedient to the Spirit. It was a life of constant serving by teaching, healing, correcting, demonstrating love, and finally laying down His life for us.

When we think of the love of Christ, we usually think of His sacrificial death. We should also think of the fact that He chose every day, to live for others (Matthew 20:28). That is what He will do in us if He is allowed to have His way. We will be living to please our neighbors for their good and to build them up.

It sounds impossible, doesn't it? In fact, it sounds ridiculous to our old nature. Remember that Jesus said, "The one who saves his life will lose it, but the one who loses his life or my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25). Have you seen the joy on the face of those who live this kind of life? Granted, there are the joyless souls of those who live this way out of duty, but those who live in this manner by the power of the Spirit overflow with the joy of the Lord. Do you need more proof that what Jesus and Paul are teaching is true? Look at the lives of those who have lived completely for selfish pleasure. Many of them end up committing suicide. They cannot find fulfillment in the things that they seek in this world; and they give up. They tried to save their life and they lost it, just as Jesus said. But those who live for God and serve mankind are fulfilled. In giving up their life, they find life. This is the example of Jesus. His was the greatest victory and most glorious reward (Philippians 2:10-11), but at the same time the most sacrificial life ever lived (Hebrews 12:3).

⁴ 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. I believe the apostle Paul is pointing us not only to the record of Jesus' life but also to the lives of those recorded in Scripture. We know that Abraham in blind obedience set an example by looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). Moses

Commented [notes9]: 1 Peter 2:12 (ESV)

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Commented [notes10]: Matthew 4:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Commented [notes11]: Mark 1:35 (ESV)

³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Commented [notes12]: Matthew 20:28 (ESV)

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Commented [notes13]: Matthew 16:25 (ESV)

²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Commented [notes14]: Philippians 2:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Commented [notes15]: Hebrews 12:3 (ESV)

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Commented [notes16]: Hebrews 11:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

left the pleasures of Egypt behind to be united with the people of God (Hebrews 11:25). Many of the prophets lived in complete submission to the will of God and were despised by their own people (Jeremiah 1:19). Paul is telling us that through the endurance and the encouragement we see in these true accounts, we should also have hope to live unselfish lives serving God and our fellow man.

I often find comfort in the Psalms of David. When he gave in to selfishness and pleasure seeking, he paid a terrible price. When he gave God his whole heart, he was blessed beyond measure (1Samuel 13:14). Our lives, like David's, are often the experience of both of these extremes. That is one reason that the Psalms are so comforting. We read of a man whose heart was after God, and yet, he had to live in hiding for years. He gave in to the lie of temptation and lost a child as a consequence of his sin. His daughter was raped by one of his sons. These are real life tragedies and yet he was a man beloved by God. These things were written for our instruction, that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

At this point in our text, Paul inserts a benediction. *⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Paul calls God the God of endurance and encouragement. If you were wondering how you might obtain the endurance that we saw in the previous verse, we see here that it is by knowing the God of endurance. He is the only One who can see us through to the end (Hebrews 10:36). He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8). He endures because He is outside of time. He endures because He has all power. And we can endure when we rely on the One who is the God of endurance. The next time you are tempted to throw in the towel, remember that God is the God of endurance. Sometimes we must come to the end of our rope before we discover that it is our rope and not God's. It is there that we learn to trust Him to be our strength and endurance. **We let go and let God.**

He is also the God of encouragement. I can testify to that! When you think that you can't go on, God begins to pour in His unique encouragement to lift your soul and encourage your faith. When you ask for the encouragement, open your eyes and heart to receive it. It may not come in the form that you expect. Like a loving father with his discouraged child, God knows exactly what we need. Encouragement may come much later that you had hoped, but it will come at the right time. The God of endurance will help you to wait for it.

The God of endurance and encouragement, in verse five, is being asked by Paul to grant us to live in the kind of harmony that patiently bears with the weak in unity with Christ Jesus. This harmony is difficult to come by, especially in our culture. Pride has no desire to die to itself. It has no desire to serve others. It makes demands upon others. This is the main source of a lack of harmony. Paul could see it in the early churches

Commented [notes17]: Hebrews 11:25 (ESV)

²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Commented [notes18]: Jeremiah 1:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you."

Commented [notes19]: 1 Samuel 13:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

Commented [notes20]: Hebrews 10:36 (ESV)

³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

Commented [notes21]: Revelation 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega, Esays the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. E

(1Corinthians 1:11). They needed this prayer as much as we do. Paul is asking for this harmony in accord with Christ Jesus that together we may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Though there are many Bible believing churches in our city, yet there is only one church. There is only one body of Christ. We must know what we believe, but we must not argue over our minor differences. Like missionaries in a hostile field, we need to see how much we have in common with our fellow believers. With one voice we should glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. Christ did not welcome us by saying, "You sure are a mess!" He embraced you like the father of the prodigal embraced him and welcomed him home (Luke 15:20). That is how we should welcome one another. We are all a mess. We all have a long ways to go, but we are washed, sanctified, sealed, and bound for eternity in God's presence (1Corinthians 6:11). Welcome one another like you believe it! Why? For the glory of God!

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, Paul points us again to the example of Jesus. He was a servant to the Jews even as they rejected Him. He was faithful to fulfill the promises of God to them. He proved God was true in spite of their faithlessness (2Timothy 2:13). One of those promises was that the world would be blessed through Abraham (Genesis 18:18). Jesus is that blessing to the world as Paul goes on to describe.

⁹ 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."¹⁰ And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."¹¹ And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." For those Jews who had trouble accepting their Gentile brothers and sisters with their strange customs, Paul reminded the Jews of the many promises of God that pointed to the Gentiles knowing the Messiah's mercy and glorifying God together with Israel. Paul is quoting 2 Samuel 22:50, Deuteronomy 32:43, and Psalm 117:1 as proof that God has accepted the Gentiles in Christ. Paul is showing us that it was always God's plan that the people from all over the world would be one in Christ and in harmony bring praise to the Lord and glorify His name.

I have been blessed to witness the wonder of many different cultures coming together to glorify God. It is a little taste of heaven. We experienced it in Capernaum with people from India and Nigeria. I've experienced it in West Africa and in India. I've even experience it on the shores of the Jordan with messianic believers. The language and customs may be different, some of the nonessential convictions are different, but together with one voice we glorify God and extol Him. It is glorious!

Commented [notes22]: 1 Corinthians 1:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

Commented [notes23]: Luke 15:20 (ESV)

²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

Commented [notes24]: 1 Corinthians 6:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Commented [notes25]: 2 Timothy 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ If we are faithless, he remains faithful. For he cannot deny himself.

Commented [notes26]: Genesis 18:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

Commented [notes27]: 2 Samuel 22:50 (ESV)

⁵⁰ For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name.

Commented [notes28]: Deuteronomy 32:43 (ESV)

⁴³ Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land."

Commented [notes29]: Psalm 117:1 (ESV)

¹ Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!

¹² And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." Jesus, through the womb of Mary, was a descendent of Jesse. Just as Isaiah predicted, Jesus is reigning in the hearts of people around the world. Who would've ever thought that a carpenter from the insignificant town of Nazareth would one day rule in the hearts of billions around the world? Paul is quoting Isaiah 11:1. Yes, Jesus is the hope of us Gentiles. Man's political solutions have given us no hope. Religious leaders throughout time, lying dead in their graves, offer us no hope. Current day gurus with their financial empires belie their message. Jesus' victory over death and transformation of the human heart is the only hope of mankind. That hope has spread throughout the world. Just as Isaiah predicted, Jesus reigns in the hearts of people everywhere. Paul is pointing to this glorious reality, so that we would put aside our petty differences and together glorify God with one voice for all that He has done and is doing.

Commented [notes30]: Isaiah 11:1 (ESV)

¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

Paul closes this passage with one more beautiful benediction. *¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.* Paul has called God the God of endurance and encouragement. Now he refers to Him as the God of hope. He prays that we may be filled with all joy and peace in believing. How can you not have joy and peace when you believe in an all-powerful God who loves you enough to give Himself for you? If you believe that God has fulfilled His ancient promises in sending Jesus to redeem us that we might live forever in His presence, why would you not be filled with joy and peace? And **if you are filled with that joy and peace in believing, you will by the power of the Holy Spirit abound in hope.** We know where we're going! We know that at His right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11). We know that that God of endurance will keep us and present us blameless body, soul, and spirit, so that we stand before God (1Thessalonians 5:23). And for this, we should abound in hope. God has kept His ancient promises, and He will keep those that are yet to be fulfilled. We have every reason to abound in hope! The God of endurance and encouragement and hope is our God!

Commented [notes31]: Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Commented [notes32]: 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (ESV)

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions:

- 1 Do you see the church living up to Ephesians 3:10 and today's verses?
- 2 How are verses 1 and 2 possible?
- 3 What do people see when they read you?
- 4 What is Jesus' example?
- 5 How do the Scriptures encourage this hope?
- 6 What titles does Paul use for God? How does that speak to your heart?
- 7 What is the result of harmony?
- 8 Why does Paul bring up the fulfillment of prophecy?
- 9 What is the God title in verse 13?
- 10 Why does Paul ask we be filled with all joy and peace?