2023 NYM Indy, 2023

 **WITH ONE MIND GLORIFY GOD**

 (Have Christ’s Mindset)

Romans 15:1-13 Key Verses: 15:5-6

**“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

 Happy New Year! During 2022 God has done great work in the midst of many trials. Now 2023 has come. Yet, our trials have not disappeared. That is why we need God’s vision as we begin this new year. Then we can expect great things from God and attempt great things for God. As I prayed about this, Romans 15:6 came to my heart–especially “...with one mind glorify God.” This was Apostle Paul’s prayer for the church in Rome.

 Let’s briefly consider the context of this prayer. In chapters 1-8 Paul proclaims the gospel and develops sound Christian doctrine: the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes; this salvation comes by faith in Jesus Christ alone, and is only by grace, not by works; in regard to this salvation, faith alone matters–not cultural or generational elements. This gospel truth is absolute, universal, everlasting, and unchanging. Based on this gospel truth, in chapters 9-16, Paul teaches Jews and Gentiles how to see each other within God’s sovereign mercy and to form a healthy church for God’s world mission purpose.

One aspect of growing as a healthy church is for people of different cultures, ages, and maturity levels to learn to live together in harmony. Since they are quite different from one another, sometimes conflicts arise. These conflicts are not about essentials of the faith, but secondary matters. In Rome they were about dietary restrictions and keeping special days. In our times, such conflicts arise over cultural and generational practices. It is not easy to resolve them, for they may be rooted in deeply held values. Since they are secondary, we may think they can be dismissed or ignored. But if they are not resolved, a divisive spirit arises, and the church can stagnate and become ineffective. So Paul dealt with this matter seriously (14:1-15:13).

UBF ministry has been built on a solid foundation of gospel truth based on the Bible, and the outstanding examples of first generation leaders. They studied the Bible deeply, obeyed the word of God and experienced God’s abundant blessing. Many heroes of faith were raised through them who went to many nations as missionaries. As the fruit of their ministries, national and new generation leaders have grown. Praise God for his great work!

At the same time, tensions have arisen as cultures and generations which are very different converge in the church. While conflicts may be inevitable, how we deal with them matters most. When we do so biblically, we can experience God’s grace and grow as a healthy church. In today’s passage Paul guides us how to do so. Most of all he prays for believers to have the same attitude of mind as Christ Jesus toward one another. In this way, they can glorify God with one voice. As we enter a new season of God’s history, let’s learn what Paul’s teaching and prayer mean to us.

Verse 1 says, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.” Who is strong? Here the strong are not those of great willpower, but of strong faith and conscience. They were sure that by faith in Jesus they were free from the ceremonial laws of the Jews. On the other hand, the weak had no such conviction and continued to follow the ceremonial laws. Likewise, in many churches today, some believers have deep convictions about non-essential truths, while those with weaker faith have no such conviction. There is a tendency for the strong to impose their convictions on the weak. However, the weak need to develop convictions that arise from their own faith. This is especially true for the new generation. They need space to learn and grow, and room to make mistakes.

What should the strong do? “...bear with the failings of the weak.” To “bear with” means to persevere in upholding the weak. A church atmosphere must be different from the world. In the world, people dare not reveal their weak points for fear of exploitation; it is “the survival of the fittest.” However, the church must be a place where weak people can live out their faith, going through ups and downs, failing and receiving help, until they grow strong. For this reason, the strong ought to deny themselves and be mindful of the weak (2). While teaching the word of God clearly, they should live out their faith by example. They should provide positive encouragement and acceptance even when the weak fail. In verse 1, “failings” is plural; those with weak faith do not fail just once, but continually. We may bear with the weak once or twice. Yet we need to bear with them continually. How can we?

We must look at Jesus. Verse 3 says, “For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.’” Quoting Psalm 69:9, Paul tells us how Jesus bore with weak sinners. Even though Jesus is the Son of God, he did not come to be served, but to serve others. In order to bear our sins in his own body, he was despised and rejected. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, people insulted him. Jesus bore this without retaliation (1Pe 2:23-24). We must become like Jesus. However, it is difficult. While bearing others’ weaknesses, we might expect gratitude. Instead, we are ignored or blamed. At such times, it is hard to endure. We may feel like giving up, or retaliating. It is at that moment that we must look at Jesus on the cross; Jesus enables us to endure. We also need to hold on to God’s word. As we listen to the Scriptures–which were written in the past–we find encouragement to endure at present, and we have hope for the future (4). With the word of God in our hearts, we have the strength to deny ourselves and please others to build them up.

When the late Dr. Samuel Lee pioneered American campuses, he spent a lot of time and energy to bear with weak people. One young man was very rebellious when a personal problem was exposed. So he assaulted Dr. Lee, causing great pain. But Dr. Lee did not retaliate; rather, he read the Bible and prayed until the word of God moved his heart. Then he responded with forgiveness and grace. The young man was moved by this grace and became more humble. Today he serves God as a missionary. As I shared in my life testimony in April, I was a proud and selfish young man. So I failed many times in various ways. However, Dr. Lee, P. Abraham Kim, and many missionaries bore with my failings, not just for one or two years, but for decades, until I could grow as a useful servant of God. There are many such stories from the mission fields. Let’s pray to bear with the failings of the weak until they become strong in faith, and able to carry out God’s great mission.

Paul had challenged the strong with a clear truth. He knew it would be hard for them to practice it; they needed God’s help. So he began to pray for them and for all the Roman believers. Let’s read verses 5-6: “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is a profound prayer for all the believers to have the mindset of Christ toward each other. When they do so, they can experience such unity that they glorify God together with one mind and voice.

What is the mindset of Christ? Paul teaches us in his letter to the Philippians. Paul exhorted them in both negative and positive terms. He said, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” (Php 2:3-4). So often, when conflict arises, selfish ambition is at the root. Selfish ambition stems from self-glory seeking: the desire to exalt oneself, one’s family, nation, school, or ministry. Nationalism, tribalism, school and ministry pride, are all enemies of Christ-centered spiritual unity. It is the essence of sin to seek one’s own honor and glory rather than God’s (Ro 1:21). God will judge each person based on their purpose of life: those who glorified God will be blessed; those who sought their own glory will be condemned (Ro 2:6-8). We must repent elements of self-glory seeking in our hearts and pray to live for the glory of God alone.

Paul also exhorted in a positive way: to value others above ourselves and to look to their interests instead of just our own. This requires the renewal of our minds. In our fallen nature, we tend to think of ourselves as better than others; we see our own strong points and others’ weak points. This thinking is prejudiced and partial; it diminishes others. But when we have the mind of Christ we can see the true value of other people and become genuinely interested in their wellbeing. A number of retired missionaries live around the Chicago center. Though they are grandparents and great grandparents, their concern extends beyond their own families to the entire church of God around the world. They meet together regularly, pray together for those in need, visit the sick, and find ways to help others. They show the mindset of Christ in our midst and bless others.

The key to living in harmony is for each of us to learn Christ’s mindset. Though Jesus is in very nature God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Instead he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross (Php 2:6-8). Christ’s mindset is opposite that of worldly leaders. They exercise power for their own glory, and hurt others. But Jesus gave up his glory and privileges as God, and served others. The Eternal Being entered into time and space. The Almighty wore the body of a weak man. The Owner of creation had no place to lay his head. The most honorable God gave up the praises of angels to receive insults. Yet when he did, God raised him from the dead, seated him at his right hand, and made him King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus’ way of humble service and obedience leads to eternal glory.

As I traveled throughout Africa in the fall, I was deeply moved by the mindset of Christ evident in so many missionaries. They gave up promising careers and left beautiful, prosperous Korea in their youths to go to the most difficult places to live in the world. They suffered from endless agonies to adapt to primitive conditions. How difficult it was to bear the suffering of their children! In this way they followed Jesus, loving, serving and discipling African people with the word of God. After more than 30 years, we can now see the fruit of their lives: so many African house churches have grown up. National leaders are taking real stewardship of discipleship ministries. We can see the glory of God through African missionaries.

While in Uganda, I stayed with Sh. Steven and Dr. Maggie Sebbale. As they talked, deep respect for their shepherds and all Korean missionaries was very evident. I found the same thing throughout Africa. Deep relationships of mutual trust have been built up. Missionaries truly recognize and support national leaders, and in response they are growing and bearing fruit. Yet, in some other places in the world, this kind of trust relationship is weak. Rather, tensions exist which hinder growth. The nationalism of the former CIS hinders unity among Christian brothers. For this reason, we need to cultivate trust and mutual respect in the mission fields. To do so, we need to work together. I pray to work together with Korean UBF staff to build up God’s people all over the world so that each ministry may grow, become strong and carry out God’s great mission for the world.

With Christ’s mindset we become one. Becoming one does not mean uniformity in thought and action, but unity in character and purpose, though we are very diverse. For this unity, Christ must be at the center and our common purpose: to glorify God. We can be like an orchestra. When many different musicians play their own instruments according to the score, they produce a beautiful harmony. But if one musician plays in their own way to show off, it ruins everything. There are many different kinds of people in our church from various countries, diverse backgrounds, and endowed with many kinds of gifts and talents. Yet it is the same God who has worked in each one according to his own wisdom and purpose, and all of them are necessary. Everyone’s presence is valuable; everyone’s gift contributes to the harmony; everyone’s voice sings for the glory of God. In this way, they produce beautiful songs of praise to God. Do you see God’s vision for his church? Let’s see God’s great vision through the ISBC 2023.

Look at verse 6 again: “....so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul’s prayer is not just for individual believers, but for the church to glorify God. To glorify God means to reveal him: his love, goodness, power, mercy, saving grace and more. Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God’s glory. Christ wants to reveal his glory through his church as we are united to obey his words. Christ commands his people to love one another as he has loved us (Jn 13:34-35). He has also commanded us to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18-20). When we obey his commands together with one mind, we can glorify God. This should be our spiritual direction. Though we have many prayer topics, our first one should be to glorify God together with one mind.

 Our prayer should also influence our practical faith. In verse 7, Paul said, “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” In order to glorify God, we must accept one another. How can we do so? “Just as Christ accepted you.” Christ accepted us unconditionally while we were still powerless sinners and enemies of God. He understood us, forgave our sins, clothed us with his righteousness and filled us with his Spirit. When we remember Jesus’ grace, we can accept others too. We can understand them, forgive them and love them. Without Christ, our hearts can be as small as the eye of a needle. But with Christ, our hearts open wide like a vast ocean and we can accept anyone.

In verses 8-12, Paul tells us another basis of unity. It is that we share with all people in the world the same hope in Jesus Christ. In verse 13, Paul refers to “the God of hope,” while in verse 5, he said, “the God of endurance and encouragement.” Our source of hope, endurance and encouragement is God himself. When we are discouraged, we should pray–God will encourage us. When we are weak, we should pray–God will strengthen us. When we are tempted to despair, we should pray–God will give us hope. The Holy Spirit will grant us joy and peace.

Through Paul’s prayer we have learned the secret of spiritual unity in the body of Christ. We need to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus toward one another. This comes from God; it is his gift to those who ask him. Let’s pray to have the mindset of Christ, to see God’s great vision for his church, and glorify him together with one voice in 2023!