



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for Advent 2**  
December 4, 2022

## Spirit of Unity

### Romans 15:4–13

*<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

*<sup>8</sup> 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, <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." <sup>11</sup> And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." <sup>12</sup> And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." <sup>13</sup> 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.*

We've been talking for the past couple of weeks about how Advent is not merely a time to get ramped-up for Christmas, but that it's also about preparing our hearts to receive Jesus when He comes again in power and great glory. In this week's epistle, Paul looks at how we are to live our lives between the goal posts, so to speak. Jesus came to save us from our sins; even our early childhood students know that. And we know that He will come again to receive us to Himself. But what is He doing in between these two comings? Does He have more in mind for us than simply saving us and taking us to heaven?

Certainly, there's more to His work and more to our being God's children than the beginning and ending of our spiritual story. There's a lot of living that goes on between the start and finish of our race. According to today's epistle, God is very much interested in how we spend our time on this earth. God is very much interested in us as a community of faith. Indeed, Jesus, came not just to save us and then take us home, as though what happens in between doesn't matter. He wants us to live in unity with one another, to be one in Him as fellow believers in Christ.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul points out some rather interesting things about our Christian unity. I'd like to examine a few of these today, that we may better understand what this unity entails, what it's based on, where it comes from, and what its purpose is.

Let's begin with the basis of our unity. On what is our Christian unity based? The simple answer would be that our unity is based on our common faith in Christ. Often, the simplest answer is the best. Such is the case here.



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All sorts of reasons to declare unity among people have been proposed over the years. Some have said that a good basis for unity is the location where people live. They say, “You can’t beat our little piece of the world.” My brother used to live in northern California. Beautiful country! But is that a good basis for unity? It wouldn’t be enough to get me to move there.

Others have suggested that unity should be based, not on where you live, but where you’re from. Early in our country’s history, people banded together because of their common heritage. Germans bonded with Germans, Dutch with Dutch, Swedish with Swedish. Then came the English, the French, the Italians, and the Irish. They all clung together claiming unity for themselves because of their national heritage. Some even went so far as to say that this was more important than a common faith in Jesus. All over the country there cropped up “union” churches where Lutherans worshiped with the Reformed, despite the blatant differences in doctrine, simply because they all spoke the same language. Some of the most critical doctrines of our faith were consequently compromised because of these joint worship practices. External unity was more important than unity in faith and doctrine.

What does Scripture say the basis of our unity should be? Paul writes in our text: “May . . . God . . . grant you to live in . . . harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus . . . Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you” (vv. 5, 7). Beloved, our unity is based on something far greater than national origin and runs much deeper than where we live. It goes beyond even our common faith. It has its basis in the common acceptance of *us* on the part of Christ. We accept one another, not just because we like – or even *love* – one another, but because Christ has accepted us. Each of us has been accepted by Jesus; *that* gives us our unity. Christian brothers and sisters welcome one another – in spite of their differences – because they’ve all been accepted by the One whose coming to us we contemplate especially at this time of year. The anticipated Child of Advent has accepted you and me, and this makes us one; this gives us our unity.

To deny this unity is to deny that Christ has indeed died for us all. To say that this person or that person doesn’t belong is to reject someone that Christ has accepted. Whom Christ has accepted, who would dare to reject? Such a person risks the rejection of Christ, who has made us one by His common love for us.

True believers in Christ, then, have a spiritual unity which cannot be denied. Let us revel in our unity, beloved, rejoicing that we share a common faith in the One who has accepted us by grace, who loves us and died for us and gives us His own body to eat and blood to drink. In true unity of faith, as the redeemed of God, let us share in these gifts, given us by the death and resurrection of our common Savior.

Knowing that we have this *spiritual* unity, what bearing does that have on our *external* unity? What if I don’t like my brother or sister in Christ? What if one of us is cantankerous or divisive? What do we do with the weasel in the henhouse? In answer to this, we note that Paul writes here of our God who gives “endurance and encouragement” (v. 5). Let’s be honest and admit that we have brothers and sisters in the Faith with whom



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we do not get along. Maybe you've met Christians that you just don't really like, and the prospect of spending eternity with them doesn't sound all that good to you. I'm sorry, but we must accept them, because Christ has accepted them. This is where we need the endurance and encouragement Paul speaks of. And we can count on God to give us these gifts when we need them and in the measure or to the degree that we need them.

Some of you *are* that gift of encouragement. I've seen you encouraging others; you've even encouraged me. Let me now encourage you: Don't let someone's human flaws get in the way of being the kind of Christian God wants you to be, the kind of Christian He's made you to be. Keep encouraging, keep enduring, keep being the gift of God that you are.

While it's true that the family of believers is far more diverse than most of us could stand, the Lord has promised nonetheless to give us the endurance and encouragement we need to accept one another as Christian brothers and sisters, to get along as a family of believers, and to live in Christian unity, both internally and externally.

But why? What is the purpose of our unity? Is it so that we'll all get along? Is it so we can impress the world with how loving we are? Paul writes in verse 6: ". . . that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" and again in verse 7: ". . . welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." The primary purpose of our unity, beloved, is not to have strength in numbers, not to have good fellowship with one another, not to socialize or get to know people, but to give glory and praise to God.

In the end, this is how we judge whether or not we in fact have unity. Does our *community* bring praise to God? Does our *fellowship* bring praise to God?" Does our *worship* bring praise to God? Does *whatever we do* bring praise to God? If it does, then we have unity. If it doesn't . . . if what we're doing compromises His Will, compromises the one true faith, compromises the pure doctrine . . . if what we're doing in any way cheapens the grace of God or weakens our testimony as Christians and as Lutherans, then we don't have unity – true, Christian unity – for authentic Christian unity brings praise to God.

It's my prayer that our internal unity, which we all have as believers in the saving work of Christ, will continue to create a true external unity among us, one that demonstrates our acceptance of one another on account of Christ's acceptance of us, a unity that's nourished and strengthened by the gifts of endurance and encouragement, and one that truly brings praise and glory to the One who sent His Son as the babe of Bethlehem, the Savior of Calvary, and our soon coming King. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen