

Get Along with God, Get Along with Others

**Romans 15: 4-7** (New American Standard Bible)

<sup>4</sup>For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through **perseverance and the encouragement** of the Scriptures we might have hope. <sup>5</sup>Now may the God who gives **perseverance and encouragement** grant you to **be of the same mind with one another, according to Christ Jesus,** <sup>6</sup>so that with **one purpose and one voice** you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us, for the glory of God.

## Introduction

One day an expert in the Law of Moses asked Jesus. “Teacher, what are the greatest commandments of all?” (Matthew 22:35-40). “First,” Christ replied, “love your God with all your heart, mind, and strength.” “Next, love your neighbor as yourself.” That day, Christ well summed up the entire Ten commandments of God in two sentences; love your God and love your neighbor. In my own words, get along with God and get along with your neighbor.

## Content

Before I dig deeper, let me clarify what I mean by “get along.”

Definition of “Get Along”: “to have a harmonious or friendly relationship” (Online definition). Not just to have a relationship, but to keep a harmonious and friendly relationship. So, get along with God and with people means that we are in sync with them; we are in harmony with them; not in a tolerant one or suffering relationship.

There was a man whose name was John, a.k.a., the Baptist. God sent him before Jesus to prepare the way of the Lord in the hearts of the people. “The Kingdom of God is near!” He preached. “Repent! Prepare yourself to meet the Messiah!” His bold and fiery message brought the crowds to come for baptism—the outward sign of cleansing of inner soul and washing away of sin.

As they were baptized, people asked him what they should do with their lives. John said, “Repentance is more than remorse—that is, feeling sorry for what you have done is only half of repentance,” he declared. “True repentance means to change the way you live your life—for instance, turn around 180 degrees from your sinful lifestyle and stay on the course afterwards.”

“Once you are good with God through repentance,” John the Baptist urged the crowd, “then, turn to your neighbors and bear ‘the fruit of repentance.’” “If you had stolen something from someone,” he continued, “you should make it up to that person.” “If you

had lied,” he said, “you should try not to lie again.” “If you have a sword,” he said to soldiers, “never use it to hurt people. Rather, use it to protect the weak.” “If you work for the Roman government,” he exhorted the tax collectors, “don’t overcharge your people.” His message was simple and clear: Get along with God in truth and in repentance. Get along well with your neighbor by bearing the fruit that is worthy of repentance. (E.g. Rod’s letter regarding prejudice: *I got to tell you what happened to me spiritually. I always was a little prejudiced toward blacks. I wasn’t going to join the KKK or burn any crosses on their lawns or cause no harm, but I didn’t want to live next to them when I could. I knew that wouldn’t go when I meet the Lord face to face as you can’t be a little of anything and make it. Like a woman can’t get a little pregnant; she is either pregnant or not. Well, anyway, I started praying about this about 4-5 nights ago that I could get over this. I only prayed 4-5 times and last Saturday, it all was gone. It was like a 100 lbs. of lead was lifted off my shoulders that I didn’t know I had. Signed. Rod*).

Later, Paul the Apostle takes over the baton from John the Baptist. He exhorts the believers to get along with each other in Christ as God’s people. Endure and encourage one another in Christ, he said. Be in harmony and peace with each other according to Christ. To do so, learn to accept one another as Jesus did.

The Greek word for endurance/perseverance is *hy-po-mo-ne* (ὑπομόνη). The root of this noun is *hy-po-me-no* (υπομενω) which means to ‘remain/stay behind while others go away; remain instead of fleeing; stand one’s ground; hold out; endure in trouble, affliction, persecution’ (*A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 845).

So, I can say that our God never gives up on us. When everybody forsakes us, God does not. He still stays with us. His name is Imm-anu-el (God-with-us). He is fully and eternally committed to His relationship with us through and through because of what Christ has done for us. He patiently waits and works on us until He sees the Christ-like qualities formed in our characters. In His steadfast love and compassion, He brings out the best in us. All through His everlasting endurance! What an awesome God we have! Amen.

How about the encouragement part? God always encourages us by listening to our cries. He also comforts us through His Word. How many times have we been encouraged with God’s promises! E.g. Isaiah 41:10 (I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand). Isaiah 43:2 (When you pass through the waters, I will be with you). Philippians 4:6-7 (Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God, then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus). God knows our needs and provides us according to His riches (Philippians 4:19). Sometimes, God encourages us through our fellow believers, through their loving examples and through their words as well.

Paul points out that if we practice these two Christian virtues among ourselves, the Lord will grant us *the same mind, one purpose and one voice in the Lord* (v. 6). May I call it

unity in Christ? It's not the kind of unity we easily achieve when everyone is perfect and same. Rather, it is the kind of unity only possible *in the Lord*—that is, the unity achieved despite our imperfections, and the kind of unity generated only through Christlike endurance and encouragement among His followers.

And don't forget the driving force of such unity: Christ. The key to accept each other and to achieve unity is this: **according to Christ** (v. 5). Paul's prayer for us is that God will grant us to *be of the same mind with one another, according to Christ Jesus*. Please note that God Himself had practiced His everlasting endurance and encouragement with us *for the sake of the name of His Son Jesus Christ*. Not casually but intentionally. Not randomly but according to His will. So should we be of the same mind with one another, not casually nor randomly, but in God's commandments and according to Christ's will and grace.

Accept each other as Christ has accepted us—*unconditionally and sacrificially*, we love to say. Now, some folks misunderstand this phrase: Christ's *unconditional* love and acceptance. Unconditional never means that you do whatever you want to do even against God's will, then blatantly demand God to accept you just as you are. If you don't agree with me on what I just said, please consider the example of the Exodus generation. Even though they were God's chosen people and even though they had the promise of entering the Promised Land, even though they witnessed daily miracle of God, they were denied in the end, because they provoked God too many times for years by breaking God's heart through idol worship and grumbling. Know that the unconditional love of God means that His love is not conditional in a sense that you don't earn/work hard to gain His love. It means, rather, that His love is given *freely* without our own merits—that's what it means unconditional. We have no right to claim such God's free love when we intentionally defy God's will and even do something evil in the sight of God. Remember, God can withdraw His love from us (Psalm 66:20).

Let me repeat. Only the unity within God's boundaries matters, only the unity achieved in Christ brings glory and praise to the Heavenly Father whose name is the LORD (v. 7). E.g. Interreligious Dialogue. Interreligious services. I believe any effort to achieve unity among all religions is futile, because it is not the true unity in the eyes of the LORD God. Don't get me wrong. I am all for peace among different religious groups. "Never harm or speak evil of other religions," I would say. "We must respect each other and their practice of their beliefs, too." But please understand that the unity Christ prays for in John 17:23 is for His followers alone and among them (see also Psalm 133:1), not for the unity with the world nor all the religions therein. The unity Paul and the Scripture talks about in today's text refers to the unity among Christians, too. So, please never be confused with the unity among various religions and the biblical unity among the believers in Christ. Remember, the unity *according to Christ*.

Professor Eugene Peterson describes the unity in Christ this way: The praise and glory the faith community brings to the Lord is like a "*choir singing in harmony a stunning anthem to God*" (The Message). Most of us are aware that there are four parts in the choir (SATB),

right? Each part sings its own melody, yet when all the different notes come together in harmony, they become a stunning anthem to God. That's the image Paul had in mind among the believers.

## **Conclusion**

When Christ comes again, He will look for His children who obey His commands and bear fruits in their lives. Until that time, we have work to do: get along with God and get along with each other. Let us be in sync with God daily and with one another. Our life is the training ground for us to be ready for Heaven. Let us love our God with all our hearts, minds, and strength. Let us accept each other as Christ has accepted us.

Amen.