

The God of Hope, Joy, and Peace for All! Romans 15:7-13, Titus 2:11-14, 1 Peter 2:9-10

Probably because I love both reading and history, this is one of the reasons I love word origins. In knowing where a word comes from, what its original meaning was when first spoken, my own life is greatly enriched, my world is filled with more colors. For instance, did you know that the word “**goodbye**” was just intended to be used as a writer’s shortcut, a contraction for the entire phrase: *God be with you*. So any time you use this word to bid farewell to a friend, you are saying “God be with you as you go.” And if you drill down even further you will then realize that the word “**good**” actually comes from the word: *God*. So it is God’s morning, God’s day, God’s evening, and a God thing that you do. I like that. At one time our world was so much more aware of its daily life within God’s grace and care.

Now interestingly, “hello,” the inverse of goodbye, actually means nothing. It was originally just a easily shouted word designed to get attention. So cowboys riding up on a lonely ranch would shout “haloooooo” or “hola the house” as an effort to avoid getting shot before they could get down off their horse. The word was actually popularized in the late 1880’s by Thomas Edison as the proper way to answer a telephone; perhaps just to snub his competitor Alexander Graham Bell, who thought you should answer every phone call with “ahoy.” Early telephone operators came to be known as “Hello Girls.”

Which brings me to that word in Romans that started all this other verbal inquiry: **WELCOME**. Coming from Old English, the word “welcome” literally means, *a person whose arrival is desired*. As an adjective it means, they are an honored guest. As a verb it means that I have desired to see and now am honored by their arrival.

welcome one another therefore
as Christ has **welcomed** you,
for the glory (for the honor) of God.

Romans 15:7

So when our Romans passage instructs us to *welcome one another therefore as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory (for the honor) of God*. It means that we are to treat each – from whatever branch of the Christian family that we come – as honored guests, as one whose presence is to be desired.

But, now here is the thought that really gives me pause, humbles me: Paul writes that we are to do this because this is the way **Christ received us... as his honored guest, as one whose arrival has brought him much pleasure**. Now, I don’t know about you, but that is not the way I have usually thought of my salvation.... I mean, I am very glad

that Christ died to save me, but I often think of it only as an act of mercy on his part – as one hymn states, *for such a worm as I* – not that he ever considered me his honored guest; that he was pleased to receive me into his home!

And to add to the mystery, Paul continues that **my act of welcoming another believer in the manner that Christ welcomed me, brings glory to God!**

So here is the question of the day: ***How does my welcoming of another believer, disregarding our differing convictions or levels of maturity – remember Romans, chapter 14 – bring glory to God; which is to honor God and fulfill God's purpose?***

Hopefully, our getting the answer to this question today, from now on will change the way we think of what it means for us to be “saved.” And here’s a clue: Yes, Jesus saves us individually from our sin, but as he does so he rebirths us into his larger family; we have been born again into this singular spiritual body with one main purpose which the Apostles clearly explain in all their letters! So, when Thomas Moore declared, *no man is an island*, it may not be true for non-believers, but it is especially true for Christians, because only together can we fulfill our unique God-intended purpose. That purpose is what we will dwell upon today.

So strong is our American individualistic ideal, that I guess I never thought God might have any other purpose for saving me other than that He wanted to extend his grace and mercy to me as an individual As I used to sing the song: *Now it's just Jesus and me for each tomorrow, for every heartache, for every sorrow.* But it has never been *just Jesus and me!* It has always been “Jesus and me as part of his larger family!”

All along, God has had two purposes for sending His son into our world:

- yes to save us individually from our sin and lostness (*whosoever will may come*),
- but also to build us together into one corporate entity: the body of Christ, God’s own people.

[Jesus] gave himself for us
That he might **redeem us from all iniquity**
and purify for himself a people of his own
Who are zealous for good works.

Titus 2:14

Do you see the result for our individual salvation? To *redeem us and purify us* .

But do you also see the group we were born into?

What is Chris’s purpose for this group? (someone say it aloud)

And the Apostle Peter writes

You are a **chosen race**, A royal priesthood,
a holy nation, God's own people,
**in order that you might proclaim
the mighty acts of Him who called
you out of darkness into His glorious light.**

1 Peter 2:9

Once again you see the plural nature of our salvation: you as an individual have been joined with and into: *God's own people*.

Do you also see God's purpose for your redeemed life here? (**someone say it aloud**).

Once you realize that God has always had this two-fold purpose for yours and my life – together – you will find this dual intention for our salvation showing up all through the Bible.

Take for instance, Jesus' final prayer for his followers:

I am not asking on behalf of the world
But on behalf of **those** whom You gave me,
Because **they** are Yours ... that **they** may all be one...
So that the world may believe that you have sent me
John 17:9-21

You see Jesus wasn't praying for us as individuals but as a group, God's specially selected group, and as a group having a purpose: *that the world may believe that God the Father sent Jesus*.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul explains God's two-fold salvation purpose this way:

[Christ] died for all, so that **those who live
might live on longer for themselves,
but for him who died for them** and rose again.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Again, notice that we are part of a specific group.

And what is that groups' purpose? (wait for response)

And a bit further along in this same letter Paul writes....

If anyone is in Christ, **they are a new creation**
all this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ
and **has given us the ministry of reconciliation** ...
so we are **ambassadors for Christ**.

2 Corinthians 2:18-20

So what have we become in Christ? (wait for response)

And what is our purpose? (wait for response)

And do you also see "the group" in this verse?

Yes! Notice that Paul is speaking in plurals: we, us.

Then to the Ephesian believers, Paul wrote...

You are no longer strangers and aliens,
but **citizens** with the saints,
members of the household of God, ...
In whom you are **built together** spiritually
Into **a dwelling place for God**.

Ephesians 2:19-22

So are you getting the picture?

What group have WE been saved into? (wait for response)

And what is OUR purpose as a group? (wait for response)

This is the lesson that each of us must take home today; especially today as we welcome new members into our family, especially as we come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper – also known as communion: our common union. **As individuals we were dead** in our trespasses and sins. But when God **made us alive together** with Christ, it was by birthing us into his family, making us citizens of His kingdom, fellow heirs with the saints, one holy nation, one royal priesthood, God's own people.

And God has a specific purpose for us as a group and as individual members of that group. Certainly to grow in our faith, knowledge, and unity as one body in Christ. But also, as that body, that spiritual temple, to be the dwelling place of God. And as his family to be ambassadors for Christ, to be ministers of God's reconciliation, God's own

people - zealous for good works, to be declaring the mighty acts of God who called us out of darkness into His light.

That is why I said a few weeks ago and now say again, that I seriously doubt – barring extreme isolating circumstances – that anyone can live a solitary Christian life. We need to be a part of God's family to grow. We need to "be one" with of God's own people to declare and prove to the world that Jesus Christ is Lord – for the glory of God.

So to that person who claims to have faith but doesn't feel that they need to be attached to a larger Christian family, who says, "*I can be just as good a Christian in my own back yard rather than as part of any Church,*" I think Paul would declare such a person deluded or "tossed about baby." The Apostle Peter would label them "*shortsighted, blind, and forgetful of what they have become in Christ.*" And the Apostle John would probably just say "*they are a liar and the truth is not in them.*

Which brings us back to Romans and the two very self-isolated groups of fellow believers who were refusing to acknowledge their familial connection together. These were the Jewish Christians who, having all their life considered themselves more holy, more saved, more loved by God than their gentile counterparts. And then there were the Gentile Christians who felt snubbed by their Jewish siblings' rejection. To both these groups, Paul has spent this portion of his letter stressing that regardless of how they felt about each other, nevertheless they formed one group, and thus as he wrote to the Ephesian Church, they should be making...

*making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit
in the bond of peace [because] there is one body one Spirit,
one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all, who is above all
and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:3-6

Welcome those who are weak

Romans 14:1

welcome one another therefore
as Christ has **welcomed** you,
for the glory (for the honor) of God.

Romans 15:7

To the Romans he began his “one group” lesson with this magical word **Welcome**. *Welcome those who are weak* (treat them like honored guests 14:1). And now he uses that same word again twice in today’s text

And for his fellow Jewish believers, who have had the hardest time welcoming their Gentile siblings, Paul used one last ultimate inarguable proof of God’s eternal intention to welcome the Gentiles by quoting from the Torah, the Psalms, and the Prophets – in other words their entire Bible. Thus Paul proved that all along God had wanted, and planned, to bring the Gentiles into His family: *the root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the gentiles. In him the Gentiles shall hope* (15:12). And Paul may have been slyly setting up his Jewish brethren for this undeniable admission by previously referring to scripture as, *that which was written in former days was for our instruction, encouragement, and to give us HOPE* (15:4).

Paul thus concludes his lesson on all believers being ONE in Christ’s body, having ONE hope, ONE faith, ONE corporate purpose, with this simple prayer:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy in believing
so that you may [all] abound in hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

Today, we again come to the communion table, demonstrating our common union, as individuals saved by faith, but now birthed together with Jesus into the body of Christ, one holy nation, this royal Priesthood, God’s own people, for the purpose of declaring the mighty acts of Him who called us out of darkness into His glorious light. It is very fitting that we share from one cup and one loaf – the many having become spiritually one and continuing to grow up together into Jesus who is our corporate head; with every part holding everyone together with LOVE (Eph. 4:16).

This is why Jesus commanded us to *love one another as much as I have loved you*. This is why we must *welcome one another – treating each other as our honored guest because that is how Christ welcomed us And all of this will bring glory to God*.

And let us begin by welcoming two new members.