Stronger Together 5
The Church That Shouldn't Exist
Romans 15:7
Memory Verses: Romans 15:7

MANUSCRIPT

SIntroduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

This is a carrot. I've got a carrot, broccoli, tomato, and a cucumber. These are the outcasts of the food world. The vagabonds of dinner. The enemy of little children. Not many people would say these are their favorite foods. In fact many would say they are their least favorite. And that's fair. Unprepared they are not that tasty in my opinion.

About 15 years ago I preached a message to my high school student ministry of around 100 students. I called it vegetable love. And here's the main idea; we may not like to eat vegetables, but if we are to have a healthy diet, if we are to be nutritious then we have to eat our vegetables. Right? We may not like them but we need them.

And then I applied that to people. The Bible calls us to love people whom we may not naturally want to love. We may not want to befriend them or hang with them... but we will be healthier in our walk with Christ if we do! It's vegetable love! Determine to love the carrots, and broccoli, and cucumbers, and tomatos that God has brought into your life. You will be healtheir for it!

The point is simple. The church is a salad bowl of different vegetables. We would probably not all naturally be drawn to one another. Whether it be because of our opinions, personal preferences, different beliefs, different hobbies, different social statuses or walks of life, we would never find ourselves in the same circles. But part of maturing as a believer is loving your brothers and sisters in Christ and bearing with them in love and bonding with them in the unity of our faith. In other words, in Christ we are called to set aside the things that naturally draw the world together and overcome our fleshly tendencies and embrace those who also claim faith in Christ regardless of our differences.

Of all the verses we've read in chapters 14 and 15 I believe the one that summarizes both chapters the best is Romans 15:7, which says, Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." The church is a place of welcoming... it's a place for you to belong to the body of Christ and be embraced by a faith family.

We are on the same team. We don't judge one another, we don't look down on one another for our differences. We don't cause one another to stumble. We carry one another and bear with one another. We are fighting the same fight and are struggling for the same mission.

Look around you. This church should not exist. For many reasons. We have endured many trials. We've been betrayed. We've been rejected. We have been abandoned. We moved our 100 year old church to a new location. We replanted and relaunched in a new community. We were crushed by Covid. And when you look around this room at those of us who endured, you realize that we are different ages, from different stages. We have different personalities and different preferences. And yet God has put us together for a reason! And what is that reason? To welcome one another for the glory of God! To leverage our lives for the glory of God together. To spread the Gospel of Christ to our community together! The bottom line is simple... **The Gospel creates a family that would never exist without the grace of Jesus.** The world divides us by our differences. Jesus unites us through his grace. This morning we are going to see three ways the Gospel unifies us as a church family!

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

First... **The Gospel Challenges Our Tribes.** The Gospel challenges our tendency to divide people into different groups or tribes based on trivial things. We all naturally have people we gravitate towards. When we gather with enough of those people we can say, "i've found my tribe... I've found my kind of people." And there is nothing inherintly wrong with enjoying people who are similar to us or share certain things with us.

But where Christians are different is that we don't believe that people must become like us in order to geniunely loved and accepted into our family! Look back at Romans 14:1-3. Romans 15:7 says we are to welcome one another. What phrase do we see repeated time and time again in Romans 14:1-3... welcome one another. God clearly wants Christians to welcome brothers and sisters in Christ into the fellowship of the church! This is a big deal to Paul, and a big deal to Christ!

What is the obstacle that must be overcome here? A difference of opinions and beliefs that is steering people to take sides. One tribe eats meat without conviction. One tribe abstains from meat. And both tribes judge the other. Paul brings them back to reality. Look at 14:8. We are not different tribes or cliques... we are one body in Christ. We are all the Lord's. You can have different convictions and still be close family! We don't have to find a different tribe simply because we believe something different. Why? Because the **Gospel** of Jesus Christ is **bigger** than anything that could divide us.

So let's get real. Where is your tribe? Is it your church or is it some other group? If you can't claim the church as your tribe.. why not? Is the Gospel not enough for you to unify around? Why are you unwilling to bond with brothers and sisters in Christ? Is it because of preferences or differences of opinions?

When I think about family I often think about Thanksgiving... which is

right around the corner. We've all got relatives with differing opinions, personalities, etc... We've all got an Uncle Gary. My Uncle Gary is my mother's sister's husband. He retired a Chief Master Sergeant in the Air Force after a 30 year career. He is all about law, order, and cleanliness. He is very stern, very strict, and very self assured. He is always right. In short, my Uncle Gary isn't always the most pleasant person to be around. But at Thanksgiving... he has a prominent seat at the table. Because he is family. Now imagine if the only people you welcomed to the table were people who you got along with and agreed with on everything. Eventually your thanksgiving table would be very small. The point; not every difference is a reason for division. Instead of looking for those who fit your mold, determine as a believer to expand your table. The Gospel challenges our tribes because Jesus is building a family bigger than our natural circles. And thats why... **The Gospel creates a family that would never exist without the grace of Jesus.**

Secondly... **The Gospel Costs Us Our Comfort.** If the Gospel brings different people together, then living together is going to take sacrifice. A lot of sacrifice. If we are to keep the unity of the body of Christ... we are going to have to let go of a lot of the things we are holding onto. Things like pride, preferences, opinions, and comfort. Because loving people who are different from us isn't always comfortable. Sometimes their needs inconvenience us. Sometimes their convictions frustrate us. Sometimes loving them means we can't do everything we want to do.

Again, think about who we are as a church. I truly believe that God has brought us together in Chirst simply for this purpose. To challenge our natural desires and redirect us to love people who are different. I believe he has brought us certain individuals and families to teach us how to get over ourselves and bond with those that make us uncomfortable.This is what Paul is saying in Romans 14:13. The stronger brother will always abandon his own freedom or opinions in order to love and care for another brother in the church. They will sacrifice judgement and critical attitudes.

Instead they will bear with weak; Romans 15:1.They will look to please the others and build them up. 15:2. They will endure, encourage, and seek harmony with one another; 15:5. And who is our example? Christ who according to 15:3 did not please himself but sacrificed himself for us. Who according to 15:7 has welcomed us. Therefore we must welcome all brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus had every right to demand his own comfort, yet he welcomed us for our good.

The big idea is this; the Gospel doesn't simply change who we love. It **changes what we are willing to sacrifice** because we love them. Sometimes it means giving up the last word or listening instead of arguing. Sometimes it means being patient with someone who isnt' growing as quickly as you would like. Sometimes it means surrendering your spiritual freedom because it will help maintain unity and well-being. And sometimes it means loving someone when you would honestly rather walk away. What are you willing to let go of for the sake of unity in the body of Christ?If you'll let it... **The Gospel creates a family that would never exist without the grace of Jesus.**

Thirdly... **The Gospel Creates A New Family.** Romans 15:8-9 tells us that everything Jesus has done has been done to create a new church family. We are the Gentiles whom he wants to glorify God. And what is his conclusion for this church? Romans 15:13; may the God of hope fill us all with joy and peace and faith so that the Holy Spirit may abound in us.

When we are unified... when we have peace with one another... we have joy and increase in faith and the Holy Spirit can do his thing! Perhaps one of the reasons we are lacking in Holy Spirit is because we are not as unified as we think we are! May God bring us unity! May God build this church that shouldn't exist!

Application

Church, we are not here because of our trivial similarities. We are here because our love for our savior. We are not here despite our differences. We are here because our differences mean very little in the light of Christ. We all sit at the same table because we are a part of the same team... even though we have differing opinions. We sacrifice those things that will divide us to become stronger together in Christ. We let go of our old tribes to form this tribe. We dismiss comfort in order to embrace the awkwardness of relationship. We eat our vegetables because they are good for us. We love those we are not naturally drawn to. And we glorify God through a unified church that could never exist without his grace.

Conclusion

What if the world could see it? A people from every end of the spectrum coming together for the Gospel. Across every obstacle that divides us... for unity in the body! What if the world could see us love one another the way Christ intended. To bear with one another with grace. To not judge one another with shame. To not cause each other to stumble because of selfishness. To fight for one another with a radical love. Then we would be the thing that Christ puposed for us to be. The church is supposed to be **living evidence** that Jesus can do what the world cannot do on its own. **The Gospel creates a family that would never exist without the grace of Jesus.**Do you believe we are stronger together? Do you believe that this church is worth fighting for? Do you believe it is worth sacrificing for?