

The theme that Paul continues to build on as we begin chapter 15 is a culture of honor in which love radically and selflessly seeks the sanctification of others over and above one's personal liberties and comforts. Paul laid the foundation in chapter 14 of the type of unity that is built upon a community of believers who race to the "lowest place," the place of meekness, humility and servanthood. It is a call to war against the prideful entitlement of personal liberty, not just the liberties of food and drink, but the liberty of being "right."

Verse 1- The culture of the kingdom of God is upside down and inside out when compared to the culture of the world. The last are first, the weak are strong, and those with a servant spirit are great. Strength is displayed in the embrace of weakness (the offense of the gospel, confidence that our weak love moves the heart of God, fasting and prayer) and of the weakness of our brother (forgiveness, mercy, longsuffering).

Verse 2- This is a Pauline theme developed at length in **1 Cor. 12-14**, that "order" is defined as the "edification of all."

I. Verses 2-3 – When each one seeks to please his neighbor in a godly way, kingdom culture thrives and kingdom mission is advanced. This is because "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (**1 Cor. 12:7**). This requires that we go low together seeking to be the first to serve, the first to love, the first to forgive. If only some go after this while others are held back by offense, then we are left with some that have exhausted their own strength but receive the strength of God and eternal reward yet the mission suffers because the full recourse of the community is not at the table.

A. When we seek to go low, to bring honor and pleasure to our neighbor even when it means laying down our own rights and laying aside our own pleasure and

comfort, we find intimacy with the God who took on flesh and bore the reproach of man on the cross.

B. Paul is quoting from **Psalm 69:9** (the first part which reads, “**zeal for Your house has consumed me**”), this is the same verse that the disciples reflected upon as they saw Jesus cleansing the temple which Jesus looked at and said “My Father’s house shall be a house of prayer for all nations (**John 2:17, Matt. 21:13**).

C. What presses down upon my heart in all this is that if we are to reach the world around us with the power of the gospel, we must have a culture of prayer, and atmosphere where we really meet God, where we touch heaven! We must be a people who host His presence. **God is enthroned upon the praise** (tehila: to continually ascribe glory) **of His people** (**Psalm 22:3**). I feel that the heart of Paul here is to say that I will bear whatever reproach is necessary, I will suffer long, forgive, love mercy, I’ll go two miles with he who compels me to go with him one. I’ll do whatever it takes to remove offense, hardness of heart or fear of man, to remove every stumbling block so that we can meet God together uninterrupted.

II. Verses 5-6 (Apostolic Prayers) There are a couple dozen of these in the New Testament. They are prayers that Jesus or the apostles prayed for the Church, that’s why I use the phrase “apostolic prayers.” I encourage us to familiarize ourselves with these prayers and pray them over our church, over our families and our youth, over the church of our city and our nation, and over the work of the kingdom in the earth.

A. There is a dynamic exchange that happens when we pray back to God the things that are in His Word. *Mike Bickle* says that intercession is “*telling God what He tells us to tell Him.*” “God speaks to us and moves our heart, and we speak back to Him and move His heart.”

When we pray the words of Scripture we know that we are praying God’s will. This reality enables us to pray with faith (**1 John 5:14-15**). *Martin Luther* said that “*prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance but laying hold of His willingness!*” The place where we go to get convinced of God’s desire and will related to what we pray for is His word! He wants to send revival more than we want to see it!

B. *Mike Bickle* compares praying the word to a check that already has the signature of God on it, we can take it with confidence, add our signature to it and

cash it. This is true of praying any of the truths of God's word, the apostolic prayer are just a great place to start because they are already articulated as prayers. Use these prayers as a launching pad upon which your prayer life can take flight, as the winds of inspiration come you may deviate from the prayer, but you always have something to land back on.

C. The other great thing about these as it relates to corporate prayer is that they can help unify us in theme as we gather. Also these are not prayers against the "negative" but rather they are prayers to God for a release of the "positive." This can keep us from a depressing tone in corporate prayer.

D. Lastly, there is a reason these prayers are for the church and not for the lost. They are for the lost as well but you have to connect the dots. Paul understands that the best way to see the lost provoked to know God and the transformation of the world around us is to see the church lit on fire blazing with the heart of God! What we reproduce is important.

III. Verses 5-12- In verses 5-6, Paul prays for the believers in Rome to experience intimate unity in the place of worship. He wants them saying and singing the same things to the same God together! Verse 9 knits singing to this idea. I know of no better way to get a room full of diverse people saying the same thing to God together.

A. Verses 7-12 tell us why Paul is praying for the unity of believers in corporate worship. It is unto the witness of the gospel in the nations.

B. *John Piper* says this, "*missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is first not missions because God is first not man.*" In the pattern of the New Testament and the landscape of the end-times we see this: Worship and prayer unto the divine strengthening of missions, unto more worship until the "**earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea**" (**Hab. 2:14**)