

ONE ANOTHER

Cultivating Christ-Centered Community

LESSON SEVEN



THE FRUIT OF LIVING IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER

- Living by Jesus' prayer for the church in John 17
- Having fewer divisions between and more love among Christians
- Growing in appreciation for the diversity of the body of Christ
- Maintaining and cultivating healthy, life-giving relationships
- Refraining from speaking unkind, slanderous, and divisive things against others in the body of Christ
- Working with other believers from various traditions to achieve kingdom purposes
- Continually praying for peace and unity within the church
- Leaving others with the fragrance of Christ wherever we go

LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER, PURSUE WHAT MAKES FOR PEACE

The desire to live in harmony with one another — to be a bridge-builder and peacemaker in the body of Christ — flows from Christ's desire for the church to be one. We are one with others not because we get along or share the same nationality or socioeconomic status — our unity doesn't depend on the quality of our lives. We are one because we belong to and are one with Christ.

Those who conform their lives to the way of life described in the Sermon on the Mount will find themselves living in harmony with one another. They will be transformed into peacemakers as a consequence of God's work among them. To live in harmony with one another is to intentionally live with Christ in the presence of the world in way that makes time and space for God's Spirit to transform us into peacemakers. It is opening ourselves to do God's will that his name might be glorified; it is preparing a way for the reign of God, in our lives and in the world.

- When we are willing to be reconciled to those with whom we are angry instead of trying to solve our conflicts with harsh words and violence, we are being transformed into peacemakers (Matt. 5.21-26).
- When we are disciplined to remain faithful to our marriage covenants rather than abandoning our partners, we are being transformed into peacemakers (Matt. 5.27-32).
- When we are determined not return evil for evil but repay evil with good, we are being transformed into peacemakers (Matt. 5.38-42).
- When we love and pray for our enemies and welcome strangers into our lives, we are being transformed into peacemakers (Matt. 5.43-48).
- When we are content to practice righteousness for its own sake, and not wear our piety as a badge of honor, we are being transformed into peacemakers (Matt. 6.1-18).
- When are willing to store up heavenly treasure by giving to the needy rather than hoarding treasures on earth, we are being transformed into peacemakers (Matt. 6.19-23).
- When we are determined to pursue God's kingdom and justice first, rather than our own security, we are being transformed into peacemakers (Matt. 6.24-34).
- When we are able to confess the poverty of our own lives before judging others, we are being transformed into peacemakers (Matt. 7.1-5).
- When we allow God's care of us to determine our care of others, we are being transformed into peacemakers (Matt. 7.6-12).

— Adapted from "Reflections on Peacemaking" by Jeremy Marshall

LIVE IN HARMONY | PURSUE WHAT MAKES FOR PEACE

“Live in harmony with one another ... live at peace with everyone” Romans 12:16,18

Our texts for this week follow the same train of thought as those we’ve looked at in previous weeks, casting a vision for our relationships with one another amidst the circumstances of the world. It considers how we treat each other in light of the fact that none of us is better than another (see Romans 12:3). Though we are naturally tied to our positions of status and power, we are to be in Christ in such a way that our identity is not devalued by being less than others and not enhanced by being greater than others.

Read Romans 12:11-21

There’s something about harmony in music that’s naturally pleasing to the ear. We’ve all experienced the beauty of voices singing in harmony together in worship. Most of us can list off a host of our favorite bands that are known for their instrumental or vocal harmonies. But creating harmony isn’t easy. There’s all kinds of combinations of notes you can sing or play on an instrument, but if they don’t work in concert with one another, the sound isn’t pleasant. A beautiful harmony requires a certain combination of different notes.

In verse 16 Paul calls us to, “Live in harmony with one another.” He goes on to say, “Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” Several other passages in the NT speak to the same idea. Just as harmony can be difficult to create in music, it’s not easy in the church either. Paul had his own disagreements with Barnabas and Peter. He dealt with a number of divisions and disagreements in the churches at Philippi, Corinth, and Rome, and he pleaded with them to reconcile their differences and to live in peace and harmony with one another.

To be sure, living in harmony with one another today is just as challenging as it was during the life of Paul. Many of us know what it’s like to experience the absence of harmony in the church body, often over the smallest things—things that in the scope of the kingdom don’t really matter, things that compared to what we could accomplish together are insignificant.

Nevertheless, what’s difficult about Paul’s command to “Live in harmony with one another” is that it’s very broad and inclusive. Paul doesn’t say, “Live in harmony with people who have the same opinion as you, or people you like to be around, or people who look just like you.” He simply says, “Live in harmony with one another,” which implies that we should all live in harmony with *everyone*. Prior to verse 16, we don’t know for sure if the word “strangers” (v. 13) includes outsiders, though it may. But we can be certain that the reference to persecutors does (v. 14).

As with the Thessalonians and the Philippians, the Roman believers have made an impact on their community—and as a result they have serious opposition, agitators, at least. The Romans have shared the gospel with others in some way, shape, or form. They have perhaps explained to their family members, associates, co-workers, and so on why they no longer sacrifice to the deities that protect the Empire, including the emperor. Some may have even explained their new beliefs, behaviors, and community in terms of an alternative gospel, lifestyle, and family to that offered by Rome. We can’t know with certainty what they said or did. But whatever words or practices they previously shared with others, Paul makes it clear that they now need to speak and perform the gospel in its most demanding form: blessing, doing good to, and trying to live peaceably with enemies — and indeed with everyone else (“all” — v. 18).

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This will be a witness to “all” (v. 17), says Paul, for others will find such behavior “noble.” Their role in the midst of such evil is not to seek vengeance but to do everything possible to do good — even offering food and drink (v. 20) — and thereby to be victorious over evil (v. 21). In the immediate context, this “victory” would seem to include the possibility that persecutors would stop persecuting, repent, and believe the gospel.

What Does This Mean For The Church Then & Now?

Paul sees the church itself as a community of peace and harmony in its internal life. As De Villiers observes, this peace “is not only about incidental or individual aspects like greeting each other, experiencing an inner peace or displaying a peace-loving lifestyle. *It is an abiding, sustainable new way of existence and lifestyle that characterize God’s new community and creation.* The transformation of humanity to become peaceful and peace-loving has a cosmic nature and implies a new way of thinking and a new lifestyle.” (“Peace in the Pauline Letters,” pp. 15-16).

To experience this, we need to understand exactly what Paul is asking of us. First, to “live in harmony” (12:16) translates an idea rather than the specific words used. Literally Paul says, “Have the same mind.” “Be like-minded.” “Be of one mind.” For Paul, agreeing with one another or, more literally, “thinking the same way” is not an appeal to uniformity. After all, Paul has recognized and has applauded the diversity of this church body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Instead, this appeal to think the same way is an appeal to think “according to Christ Jesus” (Romans 15:5) or to have the same mind as Christ when he voluntarily humbled himself and died for the sake of the world (Philippians 2:5-11). Having that kind of love for another will facilitate living in harmony with one another and living at peace with everyone (12:16, 18).

In other words, Paul is calling us to do here is to have the same mindset, the same outlook, a common pursuit of the same goal. He says that we need to think about each other in a certain way. Love does not get lived out in perfect environments, but is given meaning and essence in times when people are in conflict with each other. These verses encourage us to love in times of conflict and disagreements as part of our Christian identity.

How do we do this? 1 Peter 3:8 says, “**Live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.**”

Recall from Romans 12:11-21 that Paul is calling the Christians in Rome to live alongside others in such a way as to bless those who persecute, to rejoice with those who rejoice, to weep with those who weep, and to associate with the lowly (vv. 14-16). To do this well requires **sympathy** and **compassion**. We’ve all heard the saying, “put yourself in their shoes” ... and this gets at the idea, but harmony and peace require more than that. Sympathy and compassion seeks to feel and experience what the other person is feeling and experiencing. How do they see the situation? What previous experiences, for better or worse, are informing their perspective? How does it feel to be in their position?

When we truly see and seek to understand one another, we can create a harmony that unites us regardless of whatever else might divide us. That’s what the church should be. We can be that when we have sympathy and compassion for one another.

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Humility is another important ingredient for harmony. True humility is thinking of the other person first (consider what we read last week in Phil 2). What we want, what we think, what we feel isn't the most important thing. When we all want to put our own opinions and desires first, we never have harmony.

Leonard Bernstein, who was one of the most talented and successful composers, conductors, and musicians in American history, was once asked which instrument was the most difficult to play. He replied, "**The second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm - that's difficult. But if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony.**"

In addition, humility works hand in hand with unity. In Ephesians 4:1-3, Paul writes,

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Ultimately, what unites us is greater than what divides us. As Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 4:4-6: what unites us is the one Lord who died for us, the one faith that gives us new life, the one baptism that joins us all with Christ's death and fills us with his Spirit, the one God whose plan and purpose is guiding all of creation. Those things are greater than all the forces of this world that work to divide us.

Finally, the presence of communal harmony requires a joint effort toward peacemaking. In Romans 12:18, Paul says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Another call to peacemaking as the responsibility of all in the community, and also as the work of the Spirit, is found later in Romans, in the context of dissension among those with differing cultural expressions of their faith in the gospel:

“For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. *Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*” (Romans 14:17-19)

Peacemaking is an active task, a practice focused on community edification, which is what Paul means, practically speaking, by love (“love builds up” 1 Cor 8:1). Paul takes this communal responsibility so seriously that he finds an inseparable connection between practicing peace toward others and experiencing the promised peace of God, as we see in the conclusion of 2 Corinthians:

“Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.” (2 Cor 13:11)

At the end of the day, Paul is realistic: he knows that there will be times when living in harmony with one another and living at peace with everyone will be a difficult task. But he calls us, as far as it depends on us, to make every effort in that direction.

DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, which bands or musical groups had/have the best vocal harmonies? Who are some of your favorites?
2. With what kinds of people do we struggle to live in harmony? What does *not* living in harmony look like? Is it always obvious?
3. What does harmony look like with those inside the body of Christ with whom we have theological differences? Political differences? Cultural differences?
4. How is Christ himself an example of what Paul calls for in Romans 12:14-21?
5. How does mourning with someone or rejoicing with someone bring about harmony with that person (Rom 12:15)?
6. The esteemed composer and musician Leonard Bernstein was once asked which instrument was the most difficult to play. He replied, "The second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm - that's difficult. But if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony."
 - In what ways does his answer relate to the life of the church?
 - What does "live in harmony" have to do with "don't be proud" and "don't be conceited" (Rom 12:16)?
 - Do you find it easy or difficult to play "second fiddle" with enthusiasm?
7. In our primary text, Paul speaks to finding harmony with those who curse you...or at the very least, don't treat you well. At the end of the day, Paul is realistic: he knows that there will be times when living in harmony with one another and living at peace with everyone will be a difficult task. But he calls us, as far as it depends on us, to make every effort in that direction.
 - What result might come from being a blessing and speaking a blessing toward those who curse you or don't treat you well?
 - Can you think of a time when you tried this? What happened?