

All Sitting at the Table of Christ

Romans 15:1–7

Rev. Botrus Mansour, *Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance*

Presentation at the World Baptist Alliance conference in Toronto, Canada

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” [a] 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope.

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

The table of Christ, what a beautiful theme for a time like this.

A table

It is the place where Christ gathers people who have no reason to sit together except that they have all been welcomed by grace.

The Roman Empire built an empire through architecture.

Jesus made sinners into brothers and sisters through fellowship...around His table

What made me select this passage, which is not a typical one, is the fact that in both verses 6 and 7, Paul says you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Without entering into the difference between them, but he says that a certain action brings glory and praise to God.

So, what do we have in the passage that is related to this unity around the table:

three movements in this biblical passage.

What are these 3 things from us that bring glory to Him?

I am going to do a Baptist thing with 3 points and a very Western thing, using the acronym BWA. I simply found that two of the 3 points had BWA letters, so I replaced the third to make it fit.

At Christ's table, we bear one another, we welcome one another, and we advance one another, and in doing so, we glorify God.

B

1. At Christ's Table the Strong will Bear the Weak

Verse 1: We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak

I love the phrase "the upside-down kingdom" of Jesus, coined by the Mennonite writer Donald B. Kraybill.

Jesus' values are opposite those of the world.

He just flipped them.

According to the world, strength means independence, namely, I stand alone, and I don't need anybody. I am Self-sufficient.

Paul says exactly the opposite.

Strength exists for service.

The strongest believer carries another believer.

Think about the story of the paralytic in the Gospels.

Four friends. The bible doesn't say anything about them, but we will use our imagination.

Different people.

One had the initiative to bring the paralytic friend to Jesus.

What a lovely characteristic. Caring. Not passive, apathetic, or indifferent.

Perhaps another was strong physically with muscles. He could lift the paralytic.

Another knew the streets. Good Navigation. Orientation.

One was probably an encourager, a catalyst who used that while all were lifting him up to the roof (some start the initiative but move on and lose interest).

Another maybe had determination and follow-up... consistency, adamancy.

Another had a creative idea and suggested opening the roof.

The strength needed to lift the man up is different than the one needed to dig the roof (a sort of soft, delicate strength).

One was strengthening the paralytic who probably got fed up. Compassion. Gentle hand.

Imagine how many functions we have for such simple physical action.

None of them could have accomplished the task alone.

Can one complete the task of the Great Commission alone?

Each brought what he had. The loaves and fishes.

Together, they brought their friend to Jesus.

That is the Church. We collaborate to bring people to Jesus.

Paul uses another illustration elsewhere—the human body.

The eye cannot say, “I have no need of the hand.”

You could say that the eye is such a sophisticated organ, but it can’t walk or boil an egg.

Neither can the head say, “I have no need of the feet.”

The weaker parts receive greater honor.

Why?

Because every member matters.

Every gift matters. Every call matters. The strong carry the weak today, but tomorrow the weak become strong, and he/she will bear the one who was strong and is weak today. Isn’t it like with our parents? My dad lifted me up literally, physically, for years, and figuratively for decades. He was there for us. Before he passed earlier this year, we had to lift him up. He refused because of his pride at first, and despite his illness and fragile body, to get help ...to stand up, for example, but later, we did help him and hold his hand.

At Christ’s Table, the Strong Bear the Weak.

Bear.

That was B

2. For the W, I am moving to verse 5

At Christ’s Table We Welcome One Another

In the words of verse 5: Accept one another, (vv. 5)

Welcome to one another

Why? Biblical acceptance is not relativism.

It doesn't mean we are affirming everything or accepting each person's truth, as the modern approach does.

Tim Keller says that this approach is narrow-minded. Accepting everything is also rejecting one truth that some would claim.

Rather, Christ welcomed us. Then we transformed.

Every time we celebrate Holy Communion, we proclaim more than Christ's death.

We proclaim His family. We give thanks.

That is why the Greek word is Eucharist.

Thanksgiving. We celebrate fellowship.

Paul says, "God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with His Son."

John writes, "We proclaim these things so that you also may have fellowship with us."

Therefore, the table is both vertical and horizontal.

We commune with Christ.

We also communicate with one another. The cross reconciles us to God.

Then, horizontally, the table reconciles us into one.

Brothers and sisters, our divided world does not need another impressive monument.

Rome already built those. Canada built one at least. We went to the NC tower yesterday. 553 meters is remarkable. More than half a kilometer upwards.

Our world needs to see something only Christ can build.

A group of people sitting around a table. Where the strong carry the weak.

Where every member contributes.

Where every nation brings its gifts.

Where no one dominates.

Where collaboration replaces competition.

Where truth is spoken in love. Where fellowship overcomes suspicion.

Where Christ is the Head.

3. Now we go back to verse 2

At Christ's Table, we build up One Another or advance one another.

So that is the A in the BWA.

I found it translated in some versions as edification. Growing in faith. For the sake of the acronym, I will use a term that has wider implications: Advance

Paul says, "build up/advance one another" at the end of verse 2.

How? Not by working in isolation.

But by collaboration.

One of my deepest convictions is that collaboration is not simply a strategy.

It is theology.

I tell my team that working alone is a sin. It reflects a selfish, egocentric attitude towards ministry. For in the end, it is not your ministry. It is God's work.

I like the term "God's economy." It doesn't matter who takes credit, but that God's economy prevails. His kingdom prevails.

This is why I met with Marsha, head of BWA aid. We want to cooperate. Collaborate.

This is why I spoke to Dr. Elijah Brown to find ways to collaborate for the gospel. I think we, as Baptists, are well-equipped to collaborate with others beyond denominational lines in at least one way. Because of our congregational nature. Our informal way without complications.

Decisions are made in the general assembly of the congregation, which means we engage in dialogue and discussion within the vibrant body of the church, face-to-face, until we reach a resolution. This is a gift that makes you competent to talk things over and then to collaborate.

When we use each person's gifts and strengths, we maximize the effect. We are efficient.

We minimize the waste and the overlap. Why create a discipleship curriculum when another has created one? Why should we conduct research on Bible engagement in a particular country when someone else has already done it?

Why are we inventing the wheel when someone has done it? It is like throwing God's resources (our time, money, or talents) down the drain.

This is true stewardship.

I am trying to do that in WEA

The World Evangelical Alliance is a family serving alliances in 164 nations.

We also have Baptists in our alliances.

Each national alliance is unique. Each serves different challenges.

Each has a different calling from God.

Some face persecution. Some address poverty. Some strengthen theological education.

Some engage in government. Some discipline young people.

Some work for peace. No alliance should dominate another.

No alliance should dictate another's agenda.

No alliance possesses the whole picture. Instead, we sit around one table.

We ask, "How can we strengthen one another?" This is the global collaborative initiative I am bringing to the table.

We are making it a point that there is no hegemony. We don't come with a Western agenda, especially that 75% of evangelicals are in the global south.

But every alliance tells us what they sense God is telling them.

Collaboration.

The global Church serves the local Church

The local Church enriches the global Church.

Everyone gives.

Everyone receives.

That is exactly Paul's vision.

So BWA: bearing ... welcoming and advancing. They bring the
the glory of God.

How does our unity glorify God?

In John 17 Jesus prayed, “May they all be one...”

But notice why.

And when the world sees such people— Jesus says—they will believe that the Father sent the Son.

That is why Paul ends with these words: “So that the world may believe that You sent Me.”
Unity is evangelistic.

People believe because they see something supernatural. What a bad testimony we have given in the Christian church.

The world already knows diversity.

The world knows coalitions.

The world knows political alliances.

Only Christ creates genuine unity among people who otherwise would never belong together

Around Christ’s table, there are no head tables and no back tables.

It is a roundtable.

No privileged seats. No forgotten seats.

Every chair belongs to someone whom Christ has welcomed.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, for the glory of God.”

Everything begins at the table.

Everything returns to the glory of God.

May our churches, our alliances, and the whole Body of Christ continue to sit faithfully at the table of Christ until the day we sit together at the marriage supper of the Lamb.