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There Is No Distinction

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

Psalms 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b

Matthew 14:22-33

Romans 10:5-15

5Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." 6But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) 7"or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." 14But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? 15And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

God has made salvation available and near to ALL! Period. God is always as near as the air in our lungs and the beat of our hearts. God is the love and forgiveness that is just waiting to be revealed behind every weakness and every fault that humanity can think up.

If there is no distinction between Jew and Greek - why would anyone think there is a distinction between Christians and Christians?

And yet we do. For all the great awareness and pronouncements of our early church forbearers calling for Christian Unity - ours is a most confusing mess of branches of various church directions, and yet we are all part of the same restoration movement often referred to as the Stone-Campbell movement.

And in honor of this day when we are singing a cappella, I will focus just a little on our cousins, the "Churches of Christ - non-instrumental". A bit of a quote from Wikipedia:

Churches of Christ are autonomous Christian congregations associated with one another through common beliefs and practices. They seek to base doctrine and practice on the Bible alone, and seek to be New Testament congregations as originally established by the authority of Christ. Historically, Churches of Christ in the United States were recognized as a distinct movement by the U.S. Religious Census of 1906. Prior to that they had been reported in the religious census as part of the movement that had its roots in the several independent movements that occurred through the leadership of people such as Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, and Barton W. Stone. They were active in American frontier settlements and cities. Those leaders had declared their independence from various denominations, seeking a fresh start to restore the New Testament church, and abandoning creeds. The names "Church of Christ," "Christian Church" and "Disciples of Christ" were adopted by the movement because they believed these terms to be biblical.

Branches developed within the church between those who used musical instruments in worship (now usually known as Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)) and those who chose to sing a cappella because the use of instruments in church worship is not mentioned in the New Testament. It is this latter branch which is the subject of this article. Though officially recognized as distinct movements since 1906, the actual separation between the Churches of Christ and the Christian Churches had already been taking place gradually for decades. Yet, many within both traditions consider both to still be part of the same fellowship, although they have the different worship practices regarding church music.

It is a bit ironic that a movement of Christians who found their calling for Christian unity would have so many various splitters. And yet, from my time at the General Assembly, I grew to appreciate the history of our church. So often over those few days these words were repeated, "A movement for wholeness in a fragmented world!" There is

nothing that makes anyone more aware of the need for wholeness than those who have experienced the humiliation and the pain of separation.

The last GA I can recall was the one I attended in 1992 - when there was a tremendous schism over the voting for Michael Kinnamon as President and General Minister of the CC (DoC). For those who know nothing about it - he was supporting GLBT rights, and there were a number of people who were opposed, and very loud about it. There were some horrible arguments and Rev. Kinnamon lost the election, not because there were so many opposed to Gay rights - but because there were so many afraid of another schism in the denomination.

Our church learned something from that experience and have changed the whole procedure at GA since then, in order to make it a less contentious experience. Some find it boring now, but it is definitely an experience where great care is taking to make all feel like they have been heard, and they can speak their minds and still be loved.

What was very clear to me at this assembly was the need to show love and support and try to practice wholeness and love in the face of all that fragments humanity these days. And there was a lot of love and a lot of diversity, and I was in awe.

So let us focus a minute on the scripture for today. Romans was, for Martin Luther, the most pivotal experience of his academic awarenesses. He wrote:

*"This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes . . . In chapters 9, 10 and 11, St. Paul teaches us about the eternal providence of God. It is the original source which determines who would believe and who wouldn't, who can be set free from sin and who cannot. Such matters have been taken out of our hands and are put into God's hands so that we might become virtuous. It is absolutely necessary that it be so, for we are so weak and unsure of ourselves that, if it depended on us, no human being would be saved."*

I love that bit - *"for we are so weak and unsure of ourselves that, if it depended on us, no human being would be saved."* How often do we catch ourselves judging those who think differently, act differently, speak differently, look differently than we do? And then there are all those times we don't even notice. And yet - to is up to God, not to us, and we can best just strive to receive God's grace and know that God is gracious to those we don't even like - we have no power over God's grace regardless of how we want to. And all those times we try - we are slipping away ourselves from God's grace.

*"6But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) 7"or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead) . . . ; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him."*

So we focus on perfecting our own virtues - and not on "helping God figure out who is right and who is wrong." Can you imagine what the world would be like if everyone stopped focusing on the differences between humanity and started realizing that we are all equally able to receive God's grace? We might just be able to see that the tremendous power of God is so far greater and able to unite us than all the denominational difference we can think up on this earth.

If we of the Stone Campbell movement can figure out how to worship God together - what an amazing testament that would be to the world!

*"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*  
AMEN