

“Other Centered” *Romans 15 Pt 1*

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Romans 15

1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." 4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. 8 Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, 9 and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name." 10 And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" 11 And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" 12 And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope." 13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. 14 Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. 15 Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, 16 that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.



Because of the fall, we now all come pre-wired to put ourselves in first place. We never hear a three-year-old naturally say, “You can have the last cookie,” or, “Please, go ahead of me.” Whether it pleases our flesh or not, Jesus taught that self-denial is not only the path to true joy, but also a true manifest that we are changed creatures, reborn and being transformed into the image of Christ. He said to His disciples in Matthew 16:24-25,

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

Paul said in **Philippians 2:2-4** –

“...fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Paul had told us earlier that in that church in Rome there were weaker believers, probably from Jewish backgrounds, whose consciences would be bothered if they ate food that had previously been offered to idols. Every community has these weaker brothers and sister...those whose feathers are ruffled when things don't go **their** way. As believers we do indeed have great liberties, yet Paul's direction to the strong was that they should not flaunt those liberties if in so doing causes a brother or sister to follow their example to their own harm. He sums it up (14:21), “It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.” In other words, love for your weaker brother should trump your exercise of liberty in matters where the Bible does not give direct commands.

Now as Paul continues to emphasize the need to consider the well being of a brother, he brings in Jesus Christ as the great example. First and foremost, Christ is our Savior and Lord; but also He is our example of self-denial for the good of others. Paul's message was essentially that discipleship is growing through Christ's example:

that the essence of Christianity is becoming more and more like Christ. Thus we should not live selfishly, but sacrificially to build up others. We do this in both word and example.

Godly relationships in the body of Christ are of utmost importance. This observation comes not only from these verses, but also from the fact that Paul has been hammering on this theme pretty much from 12:3 on. In that verse, he emphasizes the need for humility, since pride invariably damages relationships. He went on (12:4-8) to talk about how each of us is a gifted member of the body of Christ and that we are to use our gifts to build up others. Then he developed the theme of love, extending it even toward those who persecute you (12:9-21). After showing how Christians should relate to government authorities (13:1-7), Paul picked up again with the theme of love, saying that it is the debt or obligation which you never will be free from (13:8-10). Then (13:11-14) he showed how we should be morally pure in light of the Lord's coming. And then (14:1-23) he shows at length how the weak and the strong are to avoid judging or showing contempt for one another. In all of this, Paul's great concern was for love and unity in a church made up of people from very different and often naturally antagonistic backgrounds.

Paul spoke of this subject in 1 Corinthians 10:31-33 also incorporating the idea of glorifying God by pleasing others...

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved."

15:1 - We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves.

Notice that while Paul counts himself as being in the realm of the strong and mature, he doesn't see that position as an opportunity to rule over others, rather an understanding and opportunity to bless and support the immature. The word "ought to" or "must be" in the original language means "to owe." We "owe" God and others the heart and actions to "bear" the convictions and spiritual maturity of others. The Old King James has a more accurate rendering of this passage, when it simply says "bear the infirmities of the weak." To "bear with" can lead us to further render the meaning "put up with." But the actual meaning is "to put upon one's self...to carry." We are to carry the weaknesses of others upon ourselves. That understanding of the words puts us personally involved in an atmosphere where God can do His work. WE are not to *do* the work, we are to *allow* the work of God free access, and then stay out of His way.

Most relational problems in our personal lives or in the church just stem from plain old selfishness. I want my way and if I don't get my way, I get angry or assertive. I demand my rights! When Cain grew angry and depressed before he killed Abel, God conducted the first "counseling session" in the Bible. He asked Cain (Gen. 4:6-7), "Why are you so angry?" *the LORD asked Cain. "Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master."*

15:2 - We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord.

NKJ - "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification." Please note that the "good" we do **to** or **for** others is to **lead them to do what is right**, and that which will "build them up **in the Lord**." Such words, actions and example may or may not please us or them in our flesh, but it is what is "for their good," and will lead them to real relationship with Christ. Not a perceived relationship, or one that always feels good. My relationship with Christ does not always feel good, in fact a lot of the time it does not please my flesh!

Please note again the words “in the Lord.” Our help should point them to Christ, not back to us. So many of us want to “help God” with His work as if He somehow needs our intervention. This directive is for all of us but especially for those who feel they need to “come to God’s rescue.” I have known a lot of people who want to have the answers for people instead of pointing them to the answers of Christ, and what that does... inadvertently or on purpose, is make them dependent upon you instead of God.

15:3 - *For even Christ didn’t live to please himself. As the Scriptures say, “The insults of those who insult you, O God, have fallen on me.”*

Jesus never asked us to do what He did not do Himself personally. He always acted out of love for others and the harmony of the body. He came “to be a servant! Even the tribulations and persecution we have experienced were first and yes, *greater* experienced by Him!

15:4 - *Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God’s promises to be fulfilled.*

Paul backs up what he has taught us by saying that what he has said is supported by Scripture. This ideal of “other-centered” living was taught and lived out by Christ Himself as well as modeled throughout the Old Testament. Through patience, or *steadfast endurance*, we might have hope. We might have an “expectation of a blessed life.”

15:5-6 - *May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Why was Paul so concerned about healthy relationships in the church? Why should we be very concerned about this? Was it just so that everyone would be happy? No, Paul’s ultimate concern was that we would have loving relationships in the church so that God would be glorified. He said “*live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus.*” Paul recognized that true Christian fellowship is to be marked not only by the study of the Word, but also by unity of Spirit. He stated in verse four that the things that were written were for our learning and thus our *growing*, and in verse five we are called to be “like-minded” toward one another. The way we live and prioritize each other in the kingdom realm reflects upon Christ, and affects the way He is perceived by others.

Proverbs 6:19 says that God “hates” a person who sows discord among brothers and sisters. Thus we can gather that He is very serious on this matter! This doesn’t mean that we will agree on every issue, but we are to have the same direction, the same purpose, and the same criteria and motives. For this is what makes us a “body of Christ.” Some folks will have peace only if you agree with them and their position. There is no way to accomplish this unity if we all take the position that our own personal stance and views are right and a priority. Unless such is true of any church, that body of Christ is doomed to eventually splinter and thus bring shame upon the cross of Christ.

To glorify God through the local church means to treat one another with such uncommon love, consideration, priority and other-centeredness that we make God look good, ***as He truly is***. We can tell others of Christ and His love, but they must firstly observe how we love one another and marvel, “How can this be?” Our living must say, “God has changed our hearts from being selfish to being concerned for the good of others. Because of

His love in our hearts, we now gladly lay down our rights to express true love for brothers and sisters in Christ.” So God gets the glory.

So as witnesses of Christ, we must put a premium on our church relationships, as Paul *and Christ Himself* addressed repeatedly in scripture. Those who do not know Christ still tend to recognize the importance of such relationships, and long to belong to such. Many are without family or at least a healthy one, and they desire to be a part of something they can count upon. Certainly any church will be imperfect, and they should see that too, but if the world inside is no different than life on the outside, why would they want it? If all of this was an easy or natural task, Paul would not have felt it necessary to spend the time here that he has.

Let us note that the directions that we read here are not a matter of a nice practice or a grand goal to reach for. Many of us are apt to treat Scripture with a *laissez faire* attitude and with a “situational” judgment as to whether we will obey. To do such is not only the height of pride, but a road that ends in destruction just as surely as it does for those who are not born again! A church can have every strength and gift and still ultimately be destroyed by the lack of harmony and community priority. If we forget we are a family, we each ultimately become an isolated orphan, cut off from the church, and eventually spiritually impotent and a bitter foe of the kingdom, *whether we know it or not*.

With “one mouth” we are to glorify God saying *the same thing*. For what we say is what we truly are, that which is truly in our hearts! Luke 6:45 “*A good person produces good deeds from a good heart, and an evil person produces evil deeds from an evil heart. Whatever is in your heart determines what you say.*”

15:7 - *Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.*

Paul makes one last plea for unity. We are called to deal with others as Christ has dealt with us! Through such a call, Paul reminds us of the grace, mercy, and patience that has brought us thus far, and asks us to merely *reciprocate*. We, in the church, are to be the embodiment of the “other-centered” nature of Jesus Christ. We are always to love each other as Christ loved us.

15:8-12 - *Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote: “For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to your name.” And in another place it is written, “Rejoice with his people, you Gentiles.” And yet again, “Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles. Praise him, all you people of the earth.” And in another place Isaiah said, “The heir to David’s throne will come, and he will rule over the Gentiles. They will place their hope on him.”*

Paul continues to explain: Jesus came to be a *servant* to the Jewish people. The word is *diakonos*, the root of where we get our word “deacon.” A *servant, an attendant* to the needs of the community and to the needs of the body and the church.

15:13 - *I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Note Paul uses the word “fill.” How many of us have never known such all-encompassing “joy and peace?” We have “tasted” of these things but have never been so “filled.” Such is keenly tied to the word “believing” (NKV)

and “because you trust in Him” as rendered here. The truth is, many of us have only “snacked” upon these gifts because we have never been swept up in full belief of God and His power!

But His desire is that with such a filling we will overflow in “hope”, a confident expectation, in God and His plan for each of us. And please note that both instances of the word “you” there is in the plural. The reference then is not to you personally, but to “us” corporately! See, this whole matter before us...and even faith in generally is not about just you, but about us as a community of believers. This is what we are to share with the world around us. Our “overflow.” But we must first be filled in order to eventually overflow! This overflowing comes via the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the spirit presence and literal control of God. Quite simply, many of us have not known this “abounding” because we have never personally been baptized in the Holy Spirit. And still operating in “solo mode” we eventually are find ourselves really alone.

15:14-16 - I am fully convinced, my dear brothers and sisters, that you are full of goodness. You know these things so well you can teach each other all about them. Even so, I have been bold enough to write about some of these points, knowing that all you need is this reminder. For by God’s grace, I am a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles. I bring you the Good News so that I might present you as an acceptable offering to God, made holy by the Holy Spirit.

Notice how Paul deals with the Roman believers: he refers to them as brothers and sisters. Paul is not lifting himself up as superior in any way to these believers that he is instructing. Paul knew who he was and where he had come from! He had not forgotten what God had done to bring him to this point. He was one of them! He believed these brothers and sisters knew what the Word said and what God expected of them. The issue was simply “would they do it?”

Yet despite being their equal and their brother, Paul wasn’t relinquishing his calling from God as a pastor and teacher. He was carefully attempting to not come across as a ruler or a pseudo-priest, and yet still stand true to his anointing. He tells them that he has had to speak boldly on some points of doctrine because God had directed him in such. It was his job. It was his calling. He was being faithful to God’s call upon his life, and was delivering the message God had given him. Would they accept him in such a position? After all, he had dealt with them pretty seriously throughout this letter. Every pastor called by God knows how Paul feels: For we understand too that we are but brothers in the Lord to all those we serve as under-shepherd. But we too have been given a message to deliver. We are still expected to lead. We too have been given a call from the Lord as “ministers of Jesus Christ.” And like Paul we are “compelled” to obey that calling and to be faithful to what God wants of us.

1Cor 15:9-10 “*For I am the least of all the apostles, and I am not worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted the church of God. But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than all the other apostles, yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace.*”