

Are You A People Pleaser?

Scripture Text: Romans 15:1-7

Introduction

For the past couple of weeks, we have read from Paul's letter to the Romans about having a peaceful Christian community. This can be a tall order to accomplish when there are many members with diverse opinions in a single body of believers. The Church, however, is God's workshop in which He works to re-create all of us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. As we had read thus far, as long as matters of conviction do not cause us to disobey God, we must not look down on one another and we must not judge or condemn one another. God has given us freedom to have convictions that we ought to respect. Therefore, when our opinion comes in conflict with another person's conviction, we have the greater duty to love one another. While freedom is a Christian right, it should not be the guide for our conduct. *Freedom is not what dictates our actions, love serves that purpose.* The strongest example of this concept and dealing with others in a church is Jesus Christ. The Church should imitate Him.

We Are Obligated to Please Others

So, we come to this passage and the question I ask is this: Are you a people pleaser? That may sound like a strange question to ask. For some, being a people pleaser sounds good. To others it sounds offensive or wrong. Have you ever thought, though, what your obligation is to each other? We all have responsibilities. We have bills to pay. We have a duty to care for other people or things. We also have an obligation to please one another in the Body of Christ. Look at the following verses.

Romans 15:1–2 ¹ *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.* ² *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.*

Paul used the words “strong” and “weak” in this passage as well as in the previous chapter to denote different groups in a church. This strength is not independence from God, but a total dependence on Him. Strength in the church does not mean being completely independent of one another, but mutual interdependence. Those who are strong understand their freedom in Christ and are not bound by non-essential matters. The strong believers are also sensitive to the concerns of others and pursue harmony in the church. They show their spiritual strength when they are compassionate toward other believers, when they could really invoke their Christian freedom to do a certain thing. They have a responsibility to tolerate and support the weaker brothers and sisters instead of living selfishly to satisfy their own desires. This is actually a responsibility we all have, for we should all consider the needs of others before ourselves.

Paul mentioned here in this passage that the stronger Christians have an obligation to bear with their other brothers and sisters in the church. This obligation may be similar to our *mutual obligation* to love one another. Recall what Paul told us back in chapter

thirteen, that we ought to owe no one anything, *except* to love one another (Romans 13:8). We all have this debt, this obligation, to love each person. That is a similar concept to verse one in this chapter. We have an obligation to bear with the *weaknesses* of each other. We have a responsibility to care for our brothers and sisters in the church. We have a duty to put aside our personal freedom for the love of others. This means changing what we do if it will contribute to the good of another person.

Paul mentioned that the stronger believers have an obligation to not please themselves. He used the word “please” three times in this passage. The stronger Christians are not to selfishly look to their own interests, but rather they ought to *please others*. This means meeting the needs of other people or fulfilling certain obligations. Paul also used the word “neighbor”, which we understand from Jesus, is anyone in need, not just our family and friends, or the person living next door to us. Paul, however, used “neighbor” to mean members in a church. We are to please our fellow brothers and sisters in the church. However, the purpose of pleasing others is *not* to give them what they want. It is far more than that. The purpose of pleasing others is to build them up, to edify them. It is like building a structure. To build something means you need sufficient time, the right materials, and the right tools to put together a proper structure. So it is with the church. We should do those things which will edify others. This is similar to another statement.

Ephesians 4:15–16 ¹⁵ *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,* ¹⁶ *from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

The source of edification is Christ and the means by which it is done is love. Some want to please people because they want to be liked. Others want to please people because they want the other person to be happy. Husbands, it behooves you to please your wife — happy wife, happy life! However, pleasing others ought to be with truth and in love. It is a fine line we must walk. We ought to not push another to change his or her ways before he or she is ready, but we also must not pander to the whims and desires of other people so as to make rules for the whole church. We also ought not to be “nice guys” who accommodate other people’s sinful ways. If it is wrong then we need to address it in love. The purpose of pleasing other members is for their spiritual good and the good of the whole church. We are to love one another and to consider one another more important than ourselves and do those things that will build up the community.

Jesus is the Master Builder Who Pleases

The Christian life involves building up one another. So important is this that Paul provided the greatest example of it. When we think of putting one’s self aside in order to please others, we need to look no further than Jesus. Christ is the supreme example of putting aside one’s self for the benefit of others. Look at the verse below.

Romans 15:3 ³ *For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”*

No one should ever say that Jesus sought to please Himself. Enduring the rejection of His Father and His friends, the whip and the nails, and the weight of human sin would not be a path to pleasing oneself. Jesus left the glories of heaven and all that was His in order to humble Himself and endure the punishment and death of a criminal. Jesus put aside His rights and His freedom because He loved the world so much. This was done to fulfill God's plan of salvation for mankind. Jesus' mission was to please God. He willingly put aside His desires to fulfill His heavenly Father's will. In pleasing God, Jesus pleases us and builds us up. He came to people who were His enemies in order to make them His disciples and give them the greatest gift of all. Jesus is the greatest example of considering the needs of others, for He lovingly considered others more important than Himself. Paul wrote of Jesus' supreme example in his letter to the Philippians. Look at the following passage.

Philippians 2:5–8 ⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* ⁷ *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* ⁸ *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Jesus was torn down in order for us to be built up. Though He was God the Son, He became a lowly human in order to pay our debt of sin and purchase our freedom from death. Through His death, burial and resurrection, all those who believe in Jesus and confess Him as Lord are built upon the chief cornerstone. While freedom may be a Christian right, it should not be the guide to our conduct. *Freedom is not what dictates our actions, love serves that purpose.* Living in love with one another is more important than exercising our right to enjoy some freedom. Jesus firmly established that principle, when He put aside His own rights because He loved us so much. If we do not act in love towards one another, we contradict Christ's love for us. We should, therefore, sacrifice our desires for the sake of others because that is precisely what Jesus did for us. We, who are called by Jesus' name, should follow His example and choose to please God rather than ourselves and seek to build others up and not our own desires.

God's Written Word was Given to Build Us Up

In verse three, Paul inserted a quote from the Old Testament. The quote was from Psalm 69, a psalm which God inspired His servant David to write almost a thousand years before Christ was born. In providing the greatest example of humble servanthood and pleasing others for their edification, Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul also encouraged us to trust God's written Word. Look at the following verse.

Romans 15:4 ⁴ *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

Whatever was written in former days includes the Old Testament scriptures. The Bible of the Jewish people and the early Christians, including Jesus and Paul, was the Old

Testament. This is the scriptures Paul was mentioning. Paul was confident that all of the Old Testament was written down for the instruction and encouragement of God's people. Paul implied that all the words of the Old Testament are words of God, words that He inspired to be written not only for His purposes at the time they were written but also for the edification of His people later. The Bible may have been written to a specific people, during a specific time, and for a specific purpose, but God uses it through the centuries in order to speak to and edify His people in every generation.

According to this passage, God gave us His written Word to teach us. The more we know about what God has done in the past, the more we know about the promises He has made and fulfilled, the greater our confidence will be in what He will do in the present and the future. The Bible is full of true stories that remind us of who God is. It tells us about people who overcame great obstacles through God's intervention. It also tells us stories of those who pleased God, those who did not please God, and those who learned from their mistakes. Scripture tells us the greatest story of all, God's redemption for mankind through His Son, Jesus Christ. It also paints a beautiful picture of a glorious future which awaits all who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. God gave us His written Word so that we might have endurance through those tough times in life. The Bible was written to encourage us to press on through difficult situations and to remind us of the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we ought to read our Bibles diligently in order to know more about God. We ought to read our Bibles diligently in order to trust Him and His will more. Paul reminded Timothy that scripture is able to make us "wise for salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15-16). The Bible does not save us, but it tells us Who does save us and how we can receive that salvation. Scripture is good for teaching us and correcting us when we do wrong. It points out our sin and reveals God's righteous expectations for us. Scripture is also good for training us to do God's work. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, God has given you work to do. The Bible is the manual that instructs us on how to work for God. It contains the marching orders for His people to go on mission together. For all these reasons and more, it behooves us to read God's written Word. So, how are you doing in getting to know God better and yourself better through His written Word?

The Goal of Our Edification is to Glorify God

The final statements in this passage are an appeal for the Church to be unified. God wants us to be in harmony with one another. Unity in the church is not a suggestion — it is a necessity. The goal for this is to bring glory to God. Look at the following verses.

Romans 15:5–7 ⁵ *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁷ *Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

These final verses read like a prayer. Paul's wish was that God would grant the church at Rome a spirit of unity. God desires for us to be united. It brings glory to Him. Paul's

statement in verse five is similar to the prayer Jesus offered at the end of the Lord's Supper. At the end of their meal, Jesus prayed that His disciples would be unified and by their unity, the world would know that God sent Jesus to us (John 17:20-23). Our unity is a result of the love we have for Jesus and for each other. As we draw closer to Christ, we will at the same time draw closer to each other in the church. This Christian unity honors God. He is glorified when the church is unified.

Therefore, both the strong and the weak in the church are exhorted to accept one another, as they each have been accepted by Christ. Even though we are sinners, God has accepted us on the basis of Jesus Christ. Such mutual acceptance brings glory to God. We are to welcome each other, even if we disagree with one another (Romans 14:1). We ought to accept others who may be different from us, or who may have different opinions about things. This honors God. Bringing glory to God should be the ultimate purpose of each believer of a church. Unfortunately, self gets in the way of that. We oftentimes seek to please ourselves rather than God or each other. If our goal, though, is to glorify God, then we will have no time for dissension, disagreements, or arguments, especially over trivial matters that are really not essential. In what way have you put yourself before others? In what way have you put your desires above God's?

Conclusion

In closing, there is a more important issue, and greater good, a bigger picture that God wants us to see. Though we have a certain amount of freedom, the greater thing to do is to love others by considering them more important. The strongest example of this concept is Jesus Christ. We should imitate Him. Jesus died to bring us together as His people, as His Bride, and whatever we need to do to maintain the love, peace and unity of His Body, we ought to do that. Rather than pursue freedom to do whatever we think is good, let us pursue those things that build up the church and which edify one another. Therefore, are you a people pleaser? More importantly, are you a God pleaser? Do you seek to please the One Who loved you so much and sent His one and only Son for you? Do you seek to please the One Who did not come to please Himself, but rather sought to build you up? Let us consider each other as more important and seek to love one another as Christ has loved us. That brings glory to God, and that is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!