

Romans 15:1-13 "Please Your Neighbor for His Good, To Build Him Up"

We start a new chapter this morning, which is not entirely divorced from the previous thought of chapter 14, which is to be patient and considerate of other Christians who have differing opinions on the liberties we have in Christ.

And by liberties I mean customs and practices that the word of God would allow, but that not all would partake in. The example Paul uses is the eating of meat and the honoring of certain days as unto the Lord.

Eating meat or not eating meat, celebrating a particular day or not is optional and should be left up to the conscience of the person. However, as Paul's point has been all along, if your preference in one of these areas goes beyond your personal practice to judging others who do not practice your preference, then this is where it can become divisive and sinful.

And this is why Paul exhorts the stronger in the faith to be patient and help the weaker in the faith to see the love of Christ and the truth of any particular matter in the light of God's word.

And this is important because if we're patient and considerate in these types of non-essential matters, then when a more serious issue comes up, which would compromise the will of God, according to His Word, then that brother or sister will be much more apt to trust that you're not going to pounce on them and destroy them, but instead they will see the same love and patience in dealing in an area that is not simply a matter of preference.

And so, Paul begins chapter 15 with Rom 15:1 "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves."

Here Paul encourages the strong in the faith, and by this he means those who are mature in Christ, those who have been walking in the Lord for a time and have a confidence in their walk, where they can be discerning between biblical matters that are not simply matters of opinion.

By the way, I would say that being mature in the faith does not always parallel time. Some Christians can be 5,10 15 years in the Lord and may still be very immature in Christ as a result of an

attitude of what Paul refers to in verse one as, wanting to please self.

Pursuing self will always stunt your growth in Christ. On the other hand a Christian with relatively little time in Christ who wants to pursue a selfless approach to serving Christ, that relatively new Christian may be much more mature in the Lord.

Christian maturity can be measured in the way we desire to help others grow in Christ while at the same time not demanding that if, 'I do such and such for you, I must get this and that in return from you.'

That's not serving, that's spiritual bartering. And this is why Paul wrote in Phi 2:3-8 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!"

And so, in our text, Paul follows up with the same type of thought as in Philippians by saying in Rom 15:2 "Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."

This is in direct opposition to what most of what the world teaches. The world's attitude is, make yourself your number one priority. Pamper yourself first, get everything you can for yourself first and if you have anything left over, then cautiously dole it out and make sure that anything you give away can be cashed in at a later time when you want something from someone.

It's giving with an attitude that I get in return. Now, there's nothing wrong with getting and then having someone meet your needs, but if you are demanding it, even if it's only in your heart, then you will usually be disappointed.

But if you're serving humbly, knowing that Jesus Christ sees your heart, and knowing that you're serving Him first and foremost, then your reward in heaven will be great.

Rom 15:2 "Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."

There's another reason why we should take this attitude. As we build each other up, the other person becomes strong in his faith and begins to reciprocate with help and encouragement and becomes a real asset in the Body of Christ, not only to others but to you as well.

All of us have our weak moments. And it's nice to know that someone else has the attitude of wanting to build us up and be a real encouragement in those times of weakness.

Paul drives the point home in Rom 15:3 "For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." [Psalm 69:9]

This is a quote from Psa 69:8-9 "I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother's sons; 9 for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me."

What Paul means by this passage in Rom.15:3 is that Jesus was willing to take the brunt of the insults which were directed to the Father. He was willing not to please Himself in that way but to lay aside His own desires and humble Himself in His service to the Father.

By the way, you may have recognized that passage from Psalm 69 as being a fulfillment of Jesus' zeal for the Father's House.

Joh 2:14-17 "In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. 15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" 17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "***Zeal for your house will consume me.***"

Christ's attitude was, 'not My will but Yours be done.' He laid aside Himself to be a servant and that's what Paul is teaching. And it's in this teaching that he can raise a very important truth as it relates to how Jesus fulfilled the word of God with His own life.

Rom 15:4 "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Here Paul is referring to the O.T. Scriptures, though this would certainly include all of Scripture as we look back to what was

written in the past from our perspective. The O.T. speaks of the coming Messiah. The O.T. gives us insights into the character of God and His love and desire to bring us into a personal relationship with Himself.

Paul is saying that this idea of servanthood didn't begin after Christ came into the world, it was always encouraged in the Scriptures as it spoke of the coming One who would come as a Servant, giving His life as a ransom for the penalty of sin.

This teaching is for our instruction. In other words, let's learn what it has to say to us and then walk in its teachings. But these teachings from God's word aren't simply rules to follow. "So that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (vs.4)

The word of God should give us great hope. Because the word of God introduces us to Jesus Christ who is the One who purchased that hope on the cross. That hope looks to the future when we will see our Creator face to face and will be received by Him as we stand before Him as "not guilty" because of Christ's blood covering our guilt and shame.

The world does not have this hope. Those who have not embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior do not have any eternal hope based on the truth. At best they have wishful thinking.

They think God grades on the curve and therefore everyone will eventually get to heaven. They think that if I do enough good works, or don't do a lot of bad things that will count for something.

Well, it may count for something, but not before God who says, all of your good works are as filthy rags before Me, if you're trying to use those good works to earn your way to heaven. This is why there is so much despair in the world. Without real hope in the One true God, they are only left to themselves and the stuff of this world. And that gets old after a while.

People all over this world have gotten for themselves all sorts of stuff. And they're always looking for better stuff. Better cars, better boats, better houses, better clothes. And though stuff may not be bad in itself, when stuff is the one thing you strive after, that is your only hope. And that's not the kind of hope you want to base your eternal life on.

Isn't that what Jesus said in Mat 16:26 "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Lots of stuff can be fun, but it's not what will last forever. We must realize that in Christ we have an eternal hope, and this is what Paul wants these Christians in Rome, and for us as well, to dwell on and walk in.

This is what can get us through those tough times in life. Larry Norman, a Christian musician, a number of years ago had an album entitled, "Only visiting this Planet." Our true citizenship is in heaven with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And that citizenship will one day be translated to the new heavens and new earth when Christ raises us from the dead to dwell with Him forevermore on the new earth.

But for those who do not embrace Christ by faith there is only despair and eternal separation from God. That should never be an option. But, you know, Paul understood how this world can beat on us and drag us down at times, but he always puts into perspective how we can keep our focus where it belongs.

Rom 15:5-6 "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Priorities get messed up, selfishness gets in the way, and we may even grow weary in our walk with Christ. But, Paul points us back to the only way in which we can effectively go forward with our God.

Most Christians want endurance to walk with Christ, and most Christians want to not only be encouraged in their faith, but to be an encouragement to others. Unfortunately, many Christians will seek that endurance and encouragement through worldly means. But in verse 5 Paul makes it very clear where that endurance and encouragement comes from.

It is "God who gives endurance and encouragement". We stumble around looking for answers and we sometimes wonder why we're not growing in Christ the way we think we should be growing. Often times it's because we think we have the answer as to how we should grow instead of going to the One who gave us life in the

first place and who is the only One who can take that life and make it grow.

But the key is giving our life away, not holding on to it tenaciously thinking we know better than God. Our lives belong to Jesus if we've placed our faith in Him. He purchased us and we don't belong to ourselves.

But instead of making us into robots He wants us to submit willingly and then He extends His hand of grace and says, 'come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.'

Included in that is strength and the hope of knowing that He will never leave us or forsake us. He is the God who gives endurance and encouragement and we need only go to Him and trust Him with our lives.

And then Paul goes on to say that every one of us should have this same attitude as we turn to and humble ourselves before our loving God who "gives you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom 15:5-6)

When we humble ourselves before God and rely on His grace and strength, we will not be preoccupied with self and we can get on with the common goal which Christ has given each of us which is to: "with one heart and mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We have been called by Christ to glorify our God with our entire lives. And you can do that anywhere. You don't need to be a missionary to Japan or to traverse the globe looking for just the right place to serve Christ, unless of course Jesus calls you to such work, which at that point we need to be willing to go.

But, serving Christ can be just as effective in our own back yard. And sometimes we lose sight of the fields white unto harvest because we're looking for better fields, when in fact Jesus has already placed us right smack dab in the middle of one of the best field's one could want.

I met a woman in Ft. Lauderdale a few years ago. This is when I was still working at Coral Ridge Ministries, which is Dr. Kennedy's ministry. I was coming out of the church one morning

and this woman with a Spanish accent came up to me looking for Dr. Kennedy.

She was from South America and said the Lord had called her into foreign missions. She wanted to meet with Dr. Kennedy because she believed the mission field she was called to was Ft. Lauderdale.

There are missionaries from foreign countries who see America as a mission field white unto harvest. If Christians in this country won't take this mission field seriously then God will simply bring in missionaries from other parts of the world and let them get the blessing others are willing to give up.

We have a great opportunity to glorify Christ in our little corner of the world and believe me there is a great deal of work to be done, but God desires to equip and then to use those who are willing to do the work as He gives the endurance and encouragement.

And because every child of God is seen as one who can be used by the Lord Paul continues his thought in Rom 15:7 "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

The word accept in the Greek is *proslambano* and its literal translation is to, "take to oneself." Take each other to yourselves and do it with the attitude of encouraging each other to turn to Christ.

We should take each other to ourselves just as Christ took us to Himself. He died for us while sinners. He doesn't condone our sin, but He's willing to take us as we are and then to conform us into His image so that we can be those lights to a darkened world.

That's what Paul is saying in the context of chapter 14 and this part of 15. He hasn't left the concern of verse one in chapter 14 which states Rom 14:1 "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.", or on his opinions, as the NAS puts it.

All of this is in light of those areas of life where Christ allows us certain freedoms. But he's saying don't let your freedoms be used to bring others into bondage, and don't be bound to anything to the degree that you're not willing to give it up for the sake of helping others grow in Christ.

Be a servant in your attitude towards one another. Again, this is where Paul is going in Rom 15:8-9 "For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs 9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." [2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49]

Two groups are being spoken of here. The Jews and the Gentiles, which really means the Jews and everybody else in the world. Paul says that Jesus Christ came to be a servant to the Jews as well as the Gentiles in the sense that He has called His people from every corner of the earth unto Himself.

We all know Joh 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

He came to the world. And in Paul's day the Jews and the Gentiles saw themselves as exclusive agents who didn't mingle with each other very often. Paul is teaching that those barriers are not to be erected and should be torn down as it relates to the Kingdom of God.

He's saying to the Jew, 'you are not the only One for whom the Jewish Messiah came to save from the penalty of his sins. God's plan was always to include the Gentiles. So work with each other. Be of the same mind as it relates to the things of God.'

And then Paul goes on to clearly show the Jews and the Gentiles how those other than Jews were meant to be a part of the Kingdom of God. And he uses the O.T. Scriptures to do this. He quotes from Psa.18:49; he quotes from Deut.32:43; he quotes from Psa.117:1; and he quotes from Isa.11:10. I'll just read them in the same order which we find from verses 9-12 in our text.

Rom 15:9-12 "so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." 10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." 11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." 12 And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."

Paul is wrapping up his point by showing that both Jew and Gentile, who may have differing opinions concerning customs or



practices which the word of God allows, don't have to fight over those things in the Body of Christ.

He's saying to both groups, as he says to us today, ' you may have different backgrounds, and different experiences, but you have One God and Savior who loved all of you enough to give His very Son for your salvation.

Don't lose sight of the bigger picture of extending His Kingdom through the gospel of Jesus Christ by concentrating on such issues as eating meat or not eating meat, observing one particular day as holy, as opposed to observing none.

Today, we might say, don't lose sight of the bigger picture by concentrating on rules and regulations we make up which have to do with dress or customs like celebrating or not celebrating particular days of the year. Rather concentrate on what counts for eternity, and that is the hope set before us in Christ Jesus which we can share to a dying world.

Paul ends this thought with Rom 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Paul knew what this hope was all about and he knew the One in whom we must turn. If we're willing to trust Him with our eternal destiny then we need to trust Him with our lives today. And if we'll trust Him He'll be faithful to fill us with a joy and a peace that will overflow to others who will see Jesus in us.

But he adds, and this is most important; "by the power of the Holy Spirit." Ask God daily to fill you with His Spirit to enable you to be His servant and representative to His honor and glory.

He will honor that request and like the loving Father He is He will take His children close to Himself and encourage us and strengthen us so that we may effectively live in the hope of eternal life and let others know what it means to know God and live in the hope He wants to give them.

My prayer for all of us is that of Paul's. I'll repeat verse 13 and end with that word from the Holy Spirit which is a promise from God Himself.

Rom 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

