

POWER TO PLEASE A Sermon on Romans 15:1-13

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Perhaps you have heard about the prayer a little girl once prayed, “Lord, please make the bad people good and the good people nice.” How to make good people nice is the subject of Romans 15:1-13. Christians may have right doctrine and meticulous practice but be very irritating about it. The question is, “How do we live with other Christians who persist in looking at things differently from the way we do?” In other words, “How do we get along with other Christians?”

There are two major causes of divisions among Christians, those that arise from differences of conviction and those from differences of background. These two factors are working today, dividing Christians all over the world.

HARMONY DESPITE DIFFERENCES OF CONVICTION — Romans 15:1-6

“We then that are strong (able) ought to bear the infirmities of the weak (unable). In Romans 14, Paul has been speaking about doubtful things. The Holy Spirit convicted some Christians there that certain practices were wrong for them. They were weak in conscience and unable to participate in those things. Other Christians have freedom of conscience to participate and are able to exercise Christian liberty. These are not differences about doctrine but about practice.

The strong brothers are to bear or assist the weak brothers. While the weak may be irritating and have a judging spirit, the strong are to acknowledge these weaknesses and love them in spite of their faults. Christ died for both the weak and the strong and they are to get along in a spirit of love and harmony.

“And not to please ourselves.” Sometimes strong brothers in Christ exercise their liberty because of selfishness — they aren’t going to curb their lifestyle for any narrow-minded Christian legalists. But God’s Word says the strong brother must set aside self out of love for the weaker brother.

“Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification (building up).” The strong are to make every reasonable attempt to please the weak for the weak do not need criticism but instruction; they don’t need neglect but attention. The strong should not get angry at the weak, defy them, cut them off from love and concern, but try to please them, patiently instruct them, and build them up in the faith. The weak should be loved, not treated as second-class citizens.

Paul never compromised when preaching the gospel. “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). Only in the area of doubtful things did he seek to please his brethren in Christ.

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God; Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Cor. 10:32-11:1).

It is natural for us to want to please ourselves but through the strength of the indwelling Christ we can supernaturally learn to love and please our brethren unto edification. If we live for self, we are adopting the philosophy of the world, If we live for Christ, his love is soon formed in us for others.

“For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, “The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” Paul appeals to Christ as the supreme example. He never pleased Himself but always sought to do the will of the Father. He left heaven’s glory, suffered the reproaches of men, and died an ignominious death because He loved sinners. He took no thought for Himself and always put others first. Christ was not selfish. Since Christ loved and died for all who would trust him, then we should love and please all our brothers in Christ, for we are one.

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” The Old Testament stories are designed to teach us by graphic and lucid illustrations how God taught men to live, not to please themselves, but to please God.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (I Tim. 3:16—17).

The Bible brings comfort, patience, and hope to the Christian and we should study it. Do you remember the Old Testament story of Jacob, that scheming, shrewd operator?

He was a Big Time Operator, always looking for his percentage and always taking care of his self interest first. God dealt with him through the years of his life until he was at last brought to wrestle with the angel alone beside the Brook of Jabbok. There God touched him and rendered him helpless so all he could do was cling to God. It was then that his name was changed from Jacob, the usurper or imposter, to Israel, prince with God. Jacob learned that pleasing God and pleasing others were the most important things in life.

“Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind, and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This prayer is for the unity of believers, for their love for one another when there are differences of conviction on questionable practices. Christian brethren are to be of one accord, one mind, and this can only be done in accord with Jesus Christ. A Christian must be in constant fellowship with his Lord. Biting your lip and trying to keep your temper is not the secret of living with difficult people. The secret is a thankful heart that continually looks up to the Lord Jesus saying, “Thank you, Lord, for the quietness and the calmness. The purity and the love which is available to me through you.” A thankful heart and an obedient will that seeks to please another for his own good is the secret of living with difficult people.

Despite the fact that Christians hold different points of view, they can be so interested in one another and so concerned about one another that they can live in harmony. The result will be that they will glorify God.

HARMONY DESPITE DIFFERENCES OF BACKGROUND — Romans 15:7-13

There were two groups in the local church at Rome — Jews and Gentiles. Both were Christians but they came from varying backgrounds, and the problem of divisions in the church arose over these different backgrounds. It is difficult for us today to understand just how great this cultural gap was. To the Jew of Paul’s day, a Gentile did nothing right: He ate the wrong food, read the wrong books, followed the wrong leaders, observed the wrong customs, and even spoke the wrong language. Friction between these two groups who really loved the Lord Jesus Christ arose from the cultural and racial gap that separated these true believers and Paul tells how to solve the problem.

“Wherefore receive (welcome) ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” — True Christians are to welcome (receive) each other because Christ died for and received each sinner that has come to him through faith. Racial and class distinctions are to make no difference among Christians. These things are merely superficial, surface points of view. The important thing is that God has received a man; therefore, we must receive him because he is a brother in Christ.

A local church is not just for the rich or the poor. There can be no class distinctions among true brothers in Christ. It is true that there will always be upper, middle and lower class people in the world, but in Christ all men are equal before God. How easy it is to think of a church as being restricted to a certain income group. You may have heard Christians say (and I have been guilty of it myself), “These are our kind of people,” implying that one Christian may be better than another.

The racial strain between Jews and Gentiles could be compared to what we have today in our churches between blacks and whites. It is my firm conviction, after studying the Bible, reading Church history and the history of the American Negro, that segregated local churches are not biblical. No matter what their color, men for whom Christ died should be able to sit in the same church and worship God together. Segregated churches present a false image to the world about us, and the younger generation is laughing at the church for its narrow-mindedness. Please do not call me a liberal. This conviction has come to me through years of studying the Bible. I do not believe that the Bible teaches segregation nor does it teach forced integration. No intellectually honest Christian can hold to the position of intentionally segregated local churches.

The thing that saddens my heart is that almost every major social movement until 1912 (at the height of the liberal/fundamental controversy) was carried on by evangelicals in this country. Today the civil rights movement has been turned over to the liberals. Evangelicals should be leading the movement, setting forth a biblical emphasis.

When I speak of integrated churches I am not speaking about interracial marriage, for this is another problem in itself. I am speaking about the fact that men of all races should be able to worship the same Christ together. The Bible certainly supports this point. Perhaps we would not have so many problems with race today if Christians in the past had obeyed the clear teaching of Scripture, "Wherefore receive ye one another."

"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, 'Rejoice, ye Gentiles with his people.' And again, 'Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.' And again, 'Esaias saith, "There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.'" Christ died for Jews and Gentiles; therefore all must be accepted into fellowship who have believed that Christ died for them.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Paul closes the main argument of this epistle with prayer. When we begin to let God work in our lives about the differences of convictions or backgrounds with other believers, then joy and peace begin to flood our hearts giving us an assurance that we are the children of God. The secret is that we must believe. Without faith, we cannot please God. We must believe God's Word and bring our lives into conformity to what it teaches. When we set aside our backgrounds, cultures, and prejudices and follow Christ, then comes joy and peace from God.

It is not natural for people to live together in harmony when they have different backgrounds. It is not natural for us to expect to see blessing come out of differences, but when we believe, Christ does a supernatural work in us so that we can overcome these social problems.

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners and any person who really wants to be saved from his sins may do so by placing his faith and trust in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour. It is not enough to acknowledge that you are a sinner and separated from God; you must personally flee to Christ who promises to keep all who trust him from the wrath to come and give them eternal life.