

Sermons through

Romans

One Mind, One Mouth

Romans 15:1-6

With Study Questions

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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 (Romans 15:1-6).

Introduction

A gentleman once called me expressing strong discontent with the decisions of the elders in his church. He could barely contain his frustration as he sought to keep his language from crossing the border of the indecorous. He wasn't accusing them of immorality or heresy. His estimation was that they were weak and feckless.

I wasn't in a position to affirm or deny his evaluation; perhaps there was some righteous indignation tucked into his rant. I was more interested with what he intended to do. "How are you going to handle this?" I asked. "Are you going to hand out flyers or broadcast with a bullhorn in the church parking lot?" He didn't know what he was going to do. But I wasn't the only person he had called. Apparently, part of his methodology was to assassinate the character of these men piecemeal through phone calls to people like me. Is this the way address the perceived weakness in others?

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves (Romans 15:1).

The Weakness of the Weak

Often the Greek orders words in terms of emphasis. The first word in this passage in Greek is "**Ought**" *opheilomen*. It means to have an

obligation. Those who are strong have an obligation. Why, after all, do you think God has given you strength?

Someone might say, "But I am not strong. I am weak. And my critique of others is their lack of sensitivity to my weakness." Now that may be accurate and insightful. But if it is true, your accurate insight, at least in this matter, is itself a strength. And the lack of sensitivity by others is a weakness. So the ought-ness of the passage applies to you, at least in certain categories.

Perhaps you prayed for wisdom regarding some exchange or difficulty. And God "**generously**" gave you that wisdom (James 1:5). What are you doing with that God-given insight, that wonderful gift of wisdom?

In this passage we are informed that if God has made you strong, you have the duty of bearing with the "**scruples of the weak**" *ta asthenemta ton adynatos*. The scruples of the weak means the failings of the weak, or, at the risk of sounding redundant, the weakness of the weak. And "**to bear**" *bastazein* means to help or assist, to carry. It does not mean to merely be patient with, or openly criticize, fools.

Noticing the weakness in another person, whether that weakness is theological, logical, moral or otherwise, is only half the battle. Properly responding to that weakness is its own challenge, especially since the shortcomings in people can be unattractive and frustrating. For example, if someone's weakness is a desperate desire for attention, are we not tempted to make sure they don't get it.

The godly, and somewhat counter-intuitive, response, is to "**not please ourselves**". This can be taken two ways: either not pleasing ourselves by giving in to our own inclination to attack our brethren. Or to recognize that whatever strength and maturity God has given us is designed for us to edify others. A Christian's strength is to be a meal served to others, not for us to eat ourselves. This leads to Paul's elaboration in the next verse.

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification (Romans 15:2).

Psychic Income?

Elsewhere the Apostle Paul writes:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3, 4).

I recently met with a seminary student who wanted advice for a project revolving around being in the ministry. When he asked about stumbling blocks I offered that no one should go into the ministry with the notion of reciprocation. When I was getting my teaching credential, they called this 'psychic income'. You won't get paid much but you will receive kudos and psychological rewards from grateful students and parents. It didn't take me long as a young teacher to experience the flaw in that system.

The point here is that we are not to enter any relationship with a 'me first' attitude. It is not about pleasing ourselves. Can you think of anything more torturous than living with someone relentlessly driven to please him or herself? Hopefully we commit ourselves not to be that person. But even in our quest for selflessness there lies this latent, subtle wrinkle in our hearts that it will pay off someday. And sadly, that false master of self-centeredness pops out like a jack-in-the-box when our ship just refuses to come in. Let us remember that whatever work we do, whoever we're doing it for, we are to **"work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men...You are serving the Lord Christ"** (Colossians 3:23, 24).

Please Your Neighbor

Let us properly grasp the meaning of the Apostle when he counsels the Christian to **"please his neighbor"**. He is not contradicting what he had written in Galatians where he wrote that if he **"were still trying to please man, I (he) would not be a servant of Christ"** (Galatians 1:10). There is a qualifier. We are called to please our neighbor for their **"good, leading to edification."**

The world likes to grab verse from Scripture and twist them to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). **"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"** (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31) as a blank and unqualified statement would descend to the lowest and most debased of activities if baldly applied by a masochist. It requires prayer, patience and wisdom to

know how to respond to the weaknesses of others in such a way as to edify *oikodomen*, which means to build, construct.

Now this may certainly include difficult and painful interactions. In the next verse we will see yet another call to imitate Christ and not all of Christ's interactions with His followers appeared soft and warm. Calling Peter "**Satan**" (**Matthew 16:23**) had to have been a rough moment for Peter. But Jesus was never malicious or self-centered, as Paul points to in the next verse.

For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me" (Romans 15:3).

Reproaches on Christ

Once again we see this very common call in Scripture to approach matters of difficulty with the mind of Christ.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted (Hebrews 12:3).

Paul's quote from the sixty-ninth Psalm appeals to hostility one should expect when they burn with zeal for God's glory and a desire to promote His kingdom. But Paul's point appears to be the pure, utter and holy disregard that Christ had for Himself in His service for others.

...even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

It is the Christian's treasure, and quite central to the Christian faith that what should have fallen upon us (wrath, judgment, condemnation, hell), fell upon Christ. We had no appropriate sacrifice to offer for our own sins. Yet, since a fitting sacrifice was offered for us, Paul makes the argument that our whole lives should yield a living sacrifice. It's been said:

...it would be very strange in us to wish an exemption from the duty of bearing the infirmities of others, to which Christ, in whom we glory as our Lord and King, submitted himself;

for he having no regard for himself, gave up himself wholly to this service.¹

If Jesus lived and died for us, we are to die to self and live to Christ, which includes our love and service to others.

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 (Romans 15:4, 5).

Patience and Comfort

Note what high regard the Apostle Paul has for the Holy Scriptures, and here the Old Testament at that! Not only does he appeal to the Scriptures as our source of instruction, he uses the same nouns which come through the Scriptures (patience and comfort) as attributes of God Himself.

This should not be construed as some sort of effort to deify (to exalt to the rank of God) words on paper. Some believe the reason God had determined, providentially, to hold back the autographs (the actually original writings of Scripture) from the church is due to man's tendency to worship articles.

Nonetheless, the God of patience and comfort and chosen the instrumentation of Scripture to be the means by which those benefits are communicated to His children. In the same way we would attentively read a last will and testament of someone who loved us and bequeathed to us their riches, so should the Christian meditate upon the testaments of God in informing us who He is, what riches He has given us and what His call is in our lives.

The two attributes Paul brings to the fore are "**patience**" *hypomones* and "**comfort**" *parakleseos*. These two work hand in hand. For when God grants us the comfort that is found in His love us and providence in all we experience, it will yield and tranquility which produces patience.

It is by drinking from this fountain that we have "**hope**" *elpis*. Hope is a very misunderstood word for the way we generally use it in our culture has little similarity to its meaning in Scripture. Hope is not some

¹ Calvin, J. (1998). Romans (electronic ed., Ro 15:3). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

fleeting wish for a doubtful enterprise, like hoping we win the lottery. Hope is a sure expectation of a future, or even currently unseen, promise from a God who is incapable of deceit (Numbers 23:19; Hebrews 6:18).

...that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:6).

One Mind, One Mouth

The end of verse five and the beginning of verse six Paul brings forth the notion of being **“like-minded”** *auto phronein* or having **“one mind”** *homothymadon*. And certainly, we are to pursue and have the mind of Christ, as Paul elsewhere indicates we do have (1 Corinthians 2:16). Apart from the mind of Christ, revealed through the inerrant (without error) and infallible (incapable of error) Scriptures, like-mindedness is fiction.

It is one thing, as limited and fallible creatures, to wrestle with the truth and slowly, with ups and downs, draw closer to it. It is an entirely more desperate matter if we have no access to the truth at all. God has graciously not left us in that desperate condition.

The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces (Psalm 119:72).

But this passage is teaching what we should be doing while that is being pursued; in the meantime, as it were. It is certainly not Paul’s intent that we should wait until we all agree on every matter before we, as a church, as the people of God, glorify God **“with one mind and one mouth”**.

Schreiner says it well:

Paul is not praying that unity will be achieved via the “weak” surrendering their unsatisfactory theology. He prays that they will be unified by learning to love and accept one another in the midst of their differences.

Jesus didn’t wait until His bride was perfect before He loved and edified her. We are brought in that direction through His love and edification. So should our hearts be toward one another.

Questions for Study

1. What responsibility do you bear when God has granted you strength or wisdom (pages 2, 3)?
2. What does it mean to “bear the scruples of the weak”? Can you think of some examples (pages 2, 3)?
3. What is the danger of seeking reciprocation in our relationships? How do you know when you’re not truly serving Christ in the midst of seeking to serve someone else (pages 3, 4)?
4. Does “please your neighbor” mean doing whatever else someone wants you to do? Explain (pages 4, 5).
5. In what ways does Romans 15:3 call us to imitate Christ? Can you think of some examples in your own life where this can be applied?
6. What “fell” upon Christ? What difference does that make to you (pages 5, 6)?
7. Discuss the Apostle Paul’s view of Scripture. What does it produce in us (page 6)?
8. How is it possible to glorify God with one mind and mouth if we have disagreements (page 7)?

