

“He Calls Us to Live for Others”  
(Romans 15:1-4)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

We saw this morning

That Jesus didn't come

Into this world to please Himself –

He didn't live for Himself –

But for others.

That's why He chose the hard road –

Why He gave up the riches of heaven

To live in poverty on earth;

The perfect love and fellowship there

To endure the hatred and selfishness of this world.

Why He spoke the truth

Knowing He would suffer for it;

Why He did what was right

Even though others would hate Him.

He was actually looking to a greater pleasure –

One that the Father promised,

If He would provide the way

For His honor to be restored,

His justice to be satisfied,  
 So that He might be just  
 And the justifier of the one  
 Who believes in His Son.

#### B. Preview.

This is the example,  
 Paul now calls us to follow:  
 That we should not live to please ourselves,  
 But find our pleasure in living to please Him,  
 By considering others.

### II. Sermon.

#### A. Let's consider first,

What Paul is calling us to do more narrowly in verse 1,  
 “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength  
 and not *just* please ourselves.”

What he says here

Follows on the heels of chapter 14.

In chapter 14,

Paul tells us about two kinds of believers –

Those who are strong in faith,

And those who are weak –

He gives us two examples of their differences –

Over matters of food

And what days to observe –

And he tells us

How to deal with these differences.

1. We need to notice first

That their differences

Were over matters of Christian liberty:

These were not moral issues in themselves –

Differences over what God requires

In His Ten Commandments –

But about the laws that were set aside

When He brought in the New Covenant –

The Ceremonial laws that had to be kept

Until Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant

With His blood on the cross.

Their differences have to do

With the dietary law –

What one may or may not eat,

Likely having to do

With whether or not

It's alright to eat meat  
 That's been offered to idols –  
 And the Jewish ceremonial feast days –  
 Whether they should still be observed.

Note that on this second issue,  
 Paul is not talking about  
 The fourth commandment:  
 God doesn't tell us to do something  
 That He has ordained for our good,  
 Only to let us decide  
 Whether or not we'll keep it.

## 2. Second, Paul first tells us

How to deal with these differences  
 When they're not viewed by both parties  
 As matters of Christian liberty –  
 When a brother or sister  
 Bumps them up to the level of a moral principle –  
 When either they accuse us of sin,  
 Or when they're offended  
 Because we're looking down on them  
 For holding their view.

First, with regard to eating meat.

Paul says,

The one who believes

He has the freedom to eat –

The one strong in faith –

Is not to despise the one

Who believes it's a sin to eat –

The one who is weak in faith (v. 3).

And the one who is weak in faith –

The one who can't eat meat –

Is called not to judge/condemn

The one who can (v. 3).

The same is true with regard

To observing the Ceremonial feast days:

The one who wants to observe them may –

As long as he doesn't add them to God's commandments,

Or make salvation depend on them as the Judaizers did –

There was nothing wrong with keeping them –

Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3),

He kept the Jewish traditions (Acts 21:23-24),

He became all things to all men,

As long as he didn't sin by so doing –

But if you believe

You need to keep them to be saved –

As the Judaizers did –

Then you destroy the Gospel of God's grace

By adding works to the perfect work of Christ (Gal. 5:1-4) –

The one who believes

He shouldn't observe them –

Who believes it disregards

All that Jesus did,

Since He fulfilled them –

Shouldn't do them (vv. 5-6).

Both may do as their conscience dictates;

Both will stand before God to give an account –

Which is why we need to be convinced

What we're doing is right –

Neither are to judge or condemn the other

With regard to matters of Christian liberty.

If we disagree with a brother or sister

Over a matter of Christian liberty,

We should not despise or condemn each other

Because the Lord receives us both.

3. But Paul zeroes in on another problem

That can arise through differences:

And that is when a weaker brother or sister

Sees us doing something they believe is wrong –

Something that is a matter of Christian liberty –

Is still convinced that it's wrong,

But is encouraged to do it anyway

Because of *our example* (14:13-15:4).

In doing this, they violate their conscience,

And sin against the Lord.

To avoid stumbling them in this way,

Paul says we who are strong –

We who believe we have this liberty –

Should set that liberty aside –

Should not merely please ourselves,

Even as our Lord Jesus set aside His liberty

To benefit us.

Notice here again,

That Paul isn't talking here about two believers

Who are both fully convinced of their own position,

Where one is offended by what the other is doing.

Sometimes, one who disagrees with us –

But who is really in no danger of stumbling –

Might claim to be the weaker brother

In an attempt to get the other

To do what they think they should do.

This is what has been called:

The Tyranny of the Weaker Brother.

R. C. Sproul labels it as a type of legalism:

When others attempt to bind our conscience

By something other than God's Law.

We'll come back to how we should deal with this a bit later.

What Paul is talking about

Is a weaker believer

Who is encouraged to do something

They believe to be wrong,

Because they see their stronger brother or sister

Doing it.

Paul writes in verses 14-15, "I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died."

How can this hurt or destroy them?

Because of what Paul writes in verses 22-23, "The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn

himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”

Whenever you do something – anything –

That you’re not firmly convinced is right,

Then you’re sinning –

Even if what you do isn’t actually wrong.

If you think it’s wrong to drink a chocolate milkshake –

Even though under most circumstances it isn’t –

And you drink one,

You’re sinning against the Lord.

So what should we do in a case like this?

Paul calls us to consider the well being

Of our weaker brother or sister,

And not exercise our Christian liberty –

Not do the particular thing they’re struggling with –

In their presence.

Paul writes, “It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles” (v. 21).

We need to be thinking more broadly –

Not just about ourselves –

We need to think about

How what we do impacts others.

Far from doing things  
 That might hurt them in some way,  
 We need to do what will help them,  
 What will build them up,  
 What will make them stronger in Christ.

That's what love dictates.

That's what Jesus has shown us

Through His own example:

Paul writes in our passage, "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME'" (vv. 1-3).

We had to think about this

Before we started using wine in our communion –

What about those who think it's wrong

To drink wine under any circumstances?

If it were just a matter of Christian liberty,

We would simply use grape juice

So as not to offend anyone unnecessarily.

A complicating factor here is that Jesus

Instituted communion with wine –

Do we have the right to change

What the Lord calls us to do?

Of course not.

We need to remember

That it's also possible for someone

To believe something is wrong,

When it's actually right.

But if it's something

The Lord calls us to do publicly,

We still need to do it,

Even if there are those who will object.

We also decided to include grape juice

For those who actually do believe

That it's a sin to drink wine

So that they could participate with us

Without violating their conscience,

Based on this passage.

#### 4. But now what should we do

When our difference

Isn't really a case of the weaker brother –

When we have someone

Who simply disagrees with us

Over a matter of Christian liberty?

On the one hand,

We can't let them bind our consciences

By something the Lord doesn't call us to do:

Again, think Galatians –

That would be submitting to legalism:

But on the other,

We can still willingly set aside

What we believe the Lord allows us to do

So that we don't unnecessarily offend them.

Paul tells us,

We are not just to please ourselves

But our neighbor for their good.

We are to build each other up,

Not tear each other down.

It's one thing to avoid being bound by their scruples;

But it's quite another to flaunt our liberty in their faces.

The Lord has called us to peace.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9).

B. But secondly, and briefly

Let's not forget the broader implications of this:

Paul writes, "Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.  
For even Christ did not please Himself" (vv. 2-3).

We are not here just to please ourselves,

But as our Lord Jesus

Sought to please His Father,

And those who would believe in Him,

So we are to seek to please Him,

Our brothers and sisters in Christ,

And our neighbors around us –

To build them up.

If we spent all our time here

Trying to make ourselves happy –

Moving from one pleasurable experience to another –

Then how will God's kingdom grow?

How are we following Jesus' example?

Jesus didn't look for His happiness here –

At least outside of doing

What His Father called Him to do –

And neither should we.

He took the hard road –

The road of self-sacrifice,

Of sacrificing His pleasures here –

And so should we.

Our ultimate happiness is ahead of us –

Whatever we might find in this world,

Is only temporary –

But what we will find there is eternal.

Don't forget,

That we're only setting aside

A lesser kind of pleasure

That we might find a greater one –

As Jesus did.

This doesn't mean

We must set it all aside –

That we can't enjoy anything in this world –

But it does mean

That the more we do,

The more we'll be like Christ,

And the more good we'll do for Him.

And that is the goal of the Christian life. Amen.

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