

Romans: Putting Others First, As Jesus Did

Romans 15:1-6

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Turn with me if you would to Romans chapter 15 as we try and pick up in the exposition of Romans. Coming now this evening to chapter 15 and verses 1 through 6. Hear the word of God.

“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.’ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word. Let's pray together.

Father we ask now for Your blessing upon our time we pray that by Your spirit You would be our teacher and instructor. Not only give us insight, but we pray Lord, for grace to leave in a different way than when we came. For Your glory for Jesus sake. Amen.

Now I am going to pick up this evening in the exposition of Romans. Brister was dealing with some latter verses of chapter 14 last week. Now this evening I want us to look at these six verses of chapter 15. Paul is in fact saying here three things that we will have to take in a different order if we are going to make sense of it. At least, I'm going to take it in a different order because I can't make sense of it in any other way. He says, first of all, something about the Bible. Secondly, he says something about Jesus Christ. Thirdly, he says something about us or something that we need to do. That's sounds pretty simple doesn't it. Let's see if we can keep it that simple.

I. The Bible

First of all, he tells us something about the Bible. He actually interjects it in verse 4. He's just quoted Psalm 69, which we will see in a minute is a reference and allusion to Christ, but he now feels the need to justify why it is that he has drawn, what is a fairly obscure text from the Old Testament, and he is going to build this huge edifice upon this text. He feels the need to interject something and say something to us about the nature of the Bible, and the nature of the Old Testament, and the nature of this passage that he has just quoted. So, he's saying to us, first of all, something about the Bible. Whatever was written was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

He is actually saying four things about the Bible. He's saying first of all, that the Bible is useful for teaching. What ever was written was written for our instruction. What ever was written in the Bible that is. There is a clear sense to what Paul is addressing here, that all of Scripture, in its totality, is useful for instruction. We need to be instructed. We need to be edified. We need to be taught. We need the Bible to inform and reshape our minds. There is no godliness apart from right thinking. Now, godliness is more than right thinking, but you can't have godliness unless you first of all have right thoughts. The way to the heart, the way to the affections, is first of all, invariably, by addressing the mind. That's why Paul spends a great deal of time writing these letters to instruct, to edify, and to teach. This is the epistle to the Romans, the magisterial epistle of the New Testament, in which Paul has been setting forth the whole sweep of God's redemptive program, the application of redemption in the hearts and lives of His people. The Bible is useful for teaching. Calvin says it would be an insult to the Holy Spirit to imagine that He had taught us anything that it is no advantage to know. What ever God has written is for our instruction. It's for our edification. He wants us to know it. He wants us to grasp it, He wants us to be thrilled by it. He wants us to be captivated by it. It's for our edification.

Secondly, what ever was written was written so that we might endure, or persevere. Now there is a grammatical point whether endurance and encouragement are both to be linked to the Scriptures. I take it that it is and I'm disagreeing with some commentators for reasons too technical to go into to. I'm going to take it in this way that Paul is actually saying that when we read the Bible, we learn something about endurance, we learn something about perseverance. We learn something about patience in the passive sense and perseverance in the active sense.

Endurance. This is one of Paul's favorite words. If you do a word study of Paul's favorite words, this is one that pops up. He loves the word endurance. He loves the word perseverance. He wants Christians to endure. Why? Because we are facing obstacles and difficulties and trials and opposition that stop us from going forward. One of the things the Bible does is to show us and to teach us to go forward. To endure, not to stop. I'm dealing with somewhat of an obsession with

The Lord of The Rings. I've got to find somewhere where it fits in a proper compartment in my life. Just at this point in time, it's a little bit of an obsession. I love those sections where Frodo keeps on saying, when he realizes the task that is now before him and where he must go, "I now know what I must do," he says, "I now know what I must do." Realizing the opposition and realizing the trial and realizing the difficulty and glimpsing something of the horror into which he is stepping, he steels himself so that he might endure, steels himself to persevere. The Bible teaches us that. It teaches that by precept and teaches us that by example, in the lives of Abraham, in the life of Joseph, in the life of Moses and the life of David and the life of Paul, and the life of Daniel. Over and over and over the Bible teaches us to endure. Supremely, the Bible teaches that by giving us glimpses of Christ, Who, for the joy that was set before Him. Despising the shame, He what? Endures, He perseveres.

The third thing that the Bible does is that it enables us to gain encouragement. Not only teaching, not only endurance, but encouragement through the encouragement of the Scriptures. It's using this wonderful Greek word *paraclete*. I only use the Greek word because you know the word in the sense of the word *paraclete*, because it is one of the names that Jesus attaches to the Holy Spirit. It's what the Holy Spirit does in our lives. He's a comforter, He is our defender, He is the one who steps beside us to uphold and defend out case.

This is a word that is taken out of the legal system of the first century. You know, if you find yourself in trouble in the first century, you wouldn't go down the main street to a firm of lawyers, you know, Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, and you didn't know who they were. NO, if you find yourself in trouble you would want a *paraclete*. That is somebody who actually knew you. Somebody who could speak in your defense. Someone who knows you intimately. That's what the Scriptures do. The Scriptures know us intimately. The Scriptures engage in this ministry of encouragement, motivating us, challenging us, equipping us, calling upon us to endure with the absolute certainty of God's covenantal promises attending our every step.

There is a fourth thing the Scriptures do, and that is they give us hope. They give us hope. "What ever was written was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures that we might have hope." We might have hope. We are tonight the most blessed people in all the world. We are amongst the company of people who have hope. Out there in the world, there is no hope. There is a fleeting hope that evaporates and disappears and is like the mist that appears in the morning that disappears as soon as the sun rises. You come to work in the morning, if you come to work in the dark, get another job. If you come to work when it's light in the morning, just when it's getting light, you come down I-55 or I-220, or wherever it is, and there is a mist. It's only there for half and hour and it's gone, it disappears. What hope there is in this world is like a passing mist, but the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, the solid joys, the lasting treasures, none but Zion's children know. That's what the

Bible gives us, hope. Not the hope of, "I hope so," but the hope of absolute certainty. The hope that says, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." The hope that says, "Nothing shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Not life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor things present, nor things to come, nor anything in all of creation." He says something to us about the Bible.

II. Jesus.

He says to us secondly, something about Jesus Christ. Look what he says about Jesus Christ, in verse three, Christ did not please himself. He quotes to them from Psalm 69, this verse that says "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on Me." Psalm 69 is one of the great messianic Psalms. If you are not familiar with Psalm 69, it's one of the great messianic psalms. Seven of its thirty-six verses are cited in the New Testament. Read the psalm, and when you read the psalm and have Jesus before you as you read every line of it, it will become clear to you what the psalm is about. It's a psalm about the suffering of Christ. It's a psalm about the self-denial of Christ. It's a psalm about Jesus becoming our sin bearer and substitute. It's a psalm that recalls how Jesus was marked, ridiculed, spat upon, how He was denied and slandered by His enemies, estranged by his brothers, criticized by the rulers and drunkards sang obscene songs about Him. That's what the psalm is saying. It's a psalm that is fulfilled whenever they accuse our blessed Lord of being an illegitimate child of Mary and Joseph. It's a psalm that is fulfilled whenever Phillip tells Nathaniel, "We have found the one that Moses and the law and the prophets wrote about, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Do you remember what they said? "Nazareth, Nazareth, can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Later when Jesus cast out demons, you remember what they said about Him? "It is by the power of Beelzebub that He casts out demons. Even on the cross, even on the cross they ridiculed Him. "If you are the Son of God, come down and save Yourself," they said to Him.

This passage tells us not only something about the Bible, but it tells us specifically about Jesus. What does it say to us about Jesus? That He did not please Himself. That He did not lead His life 'as me first, as number one first.' No, He lived for others. He lived for you and He lived for His people. He lived for those for whom He had come to die and shed His blood for and provide atonement and reconciliation. He thought it not robbery to be equal with God, and He made Himself of no reputation. He humbled Himself, and He became obedient unto death, even death on the cross. That's our Savior. That is our blessed Lord who denied Himself again and again and again and again.

III. Us.

It tells us something about the Bible and it tells us something about Jesus, then it tells us something about us. It tells us specifically something now what we need to do as a consequence of having told us something about the Bible and as a consequence of told us something about Jesus, who is quoted in the Bible in Psalm 69.

What is it that Paul wants us to do? Well, you remember in the context, he's just been speaking in chapter 14 about the whole issue of the weak and the strong. What is Paul's advice in Romans 14, for Christians who have disagreements about certain issues: you must live not for yourselves, but you must live for others. Paul is concerned about unity, unity between brothers and sisters, unity in the church of Jesus Christ, unity when some section of the church is trampling upon the consciences of other Christians in the church. Now whether that be about meat that's been offered to idols or whether that be about some other issue in the context of the early church, it's irrelevant to us now.

The principle that Paul is now enumerating here is that here is a situation in which one section of the church thinks they can do this, but another section of the church is offended. Their consciences offend them. There is fighting and squabbling and people are being trampled on. Paul is drawing a contrast between the selfishness of certain Christians and their behavior, and the selflessness of Jesus. So, he says in verse 1 of chapter 15, "We who are strong have an obligation to bare with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves."

There is the principle, there is the principle of living a godly upright, holy life. In the context of the church it is not living to please ourselves; it's living with others in mind. We are not to be full of our own importance. We may have a right to do something, and Paul isn't denying that we have the right to do that, but the Christian life is not about our rights. The Christian life is so often about denying our rights. I will not have the weaker brother tell me that I have no right to do this. That's wrong. I do have a right to do this, but I will deny myself my rights for your sake. For the sake of peace, for the sake of harmony, for the sake of the blessing of the community, we are to bear with our neighbors or weaknesses. We are to not please ourselves. We should seek to build up, or to edify, or to strengthen our brother. That's what Paul is saying.

We are so much concerned about ourselves. "Oh, what a beautiful morning, oh, what a beautiful day, I've got a beautiful feeling, everything is going my way." Aren't you glad I didn't sing it. Everything is going my way. You know what the American national anthem is? Of course you do: "Oh, say can you see, what's in it for me?" That's it isn't it? Sadly that's it. We are concerned about ourselves, our own rights. Here is Paul's prayer, "May the God of endurance and encouragement that comes from Scripture, may the God of endurance grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." You

see what is on Paul's mind all the time? The glory of God. You see what is Paul's great concern of all the time? The glory of God. We are so concerned about ourselves, we are so concerned about our rights, and we get so hurt and offended, and the church ends up in squabbles and fights and little cliques. Paul is saying, "Stop doing that. Look up and be concerned about God's glory." You know how God is glorified and you're of one mind and one heart. You may not all agree about every single issue, that's not what Paul is saying, but you are agreed that you will deny yourself your right for the sake of your brother.

You know, Scott Fitzgerald, the American writer. When he died they discovered among his papers a list of plots for future stories. This was one of them. "A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live forever." Well, that's the plot of the Christian church now isn't it. A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together. You do realize we are going to live forever, for eternity. This is where we prepare for that, here below.

There is a famous agony aunt I came across this week. Ann Landers. And I'm certain I'll get fired for this. A reader writes to her and says to her, "My two grown boys, who are thirty, my two grown boys fight so much it is impossible to have them at family parties. They don't get along with their sister, she barely speaks to them. It's barely worth all the hate that's been generated. Any suggestions?" You know what she says in reply? She gets paid a lot for saying this. She says, "Those stubborn fools will probably stay mad until there is a death in the family. Wait until somebody dies." That's the advice that the world gives. Well maybe there will be a reconciliation and maybe not, but you know in the household of God someone has already died. Someone has already died. It's as though Paul is saying, will you not come together now because someone has died?

I read last week of two New York firemen's wives who never got along. After September 11, when both of their husbands died, they are now best friends. That's a part of what Paul is saying here in the life and context of the church - "Because Jesus denied Himself, now, will you not for Jesus' sake deny yourself, that through the unity and bond and fellowship that generates, God will be glorified."

Do you know what effect that would have on First Presbyterian Church if all of us covenanted that we would live our lives to bring glory to God, that our number one concern in everything that we do was to God's glory. Now that would be renewal. That would be revival. That would be transformational. Let's pray together.

Our Father in Heaven, we thank You for Your word, and how wonderfully rich and applicable it is even to us here. Though written so long ago, it is a word that is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Now bless us we pray for Jesus sake. Amen.

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