

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 3RD-4TH, 2021 // BOOK OF ROMANS

NOT TO PLEASE OURSELVES (ROMANS 15:1-3)

The church in Rome was made up of Jewish & Gentile followers of Jesus - they were united by their faith in Jesus, but not much else.

- Paul is challenging them to intentionally pursue unity amidst their differences.
- In ch. 14 he tells them to stop arguing about "doubtful things", to stop judging each other, and to decide to not do anything that would spiritually harm another brother or sister in Christ.

Now he tells us that if we are "strong" in our faith, we have a responsibility to other Christians who are "weak" (vs. 1).

- We are to "bear with their failings"- that means we're to use our strength to encourage and show understanding to them as they grow in certain areas of the Christian life.
- If you have a testimony of God's faithfulness and deliverance in your life, this is for you!

If God has delivered you through something like a painful divorce or a struggle with addiction, you now have the responsibility to "not please yourself", but to use your experiences to help those who are weak and may be failing.

- God didn't take you through that so you could humblebrag, virtue signal, and posture yourself as "holier than thou" over those who are weak - but so you could genuinely help them.

The obligation we have as mature believers is to build up our neighbor and please him for "his good" (vs. 2) - sometimes we try to help, give advice, or offer encouragement in a very subtly self-serving manner.

- In other words, we can serve, teach, or encourage to gain adoration and a sense of importance, and not truly for the benefit of others.
- Self-centered service isn't really service.

Jesus did not serve to please Himself or live His life on earth to please Himself (vs. 3).

- He actually took upon Himself the reproaches of those who reproached God (Psalm 69:7).
- Jesus bore the sin debt for those who paid Him back in the moment with mockery, scorn, and ridicule.
- This is a heart check for those of us who only want to serve for the appreciation, gratitude, and adoration of others.

Maturity in the Christian life isn't measured by how long you've been in church, how many Bible verses you know, or how right you are on every single issue.

- It's measured by your selflessness, service, sacrifice, and your willingness to embrace obscurity in the path of building up someone who is weak even if you never get appreciated, thanked, or applauded.

WELCOME ONE ANOTHER AS CHRIST (ROMANS 15:4-7)

If we are to live to please others and not simply to please ourselves (vs. 2), we must acknowledge the impossibility of obeying such a charge on our own strength.

- We are naturally bent towards being selfish - left to our own devices we will want to build our lives around seeking our own comfort, satisfaction, and acclaim.
- The world encourages us to be selfish.

In order for us to truly be as selfless and sacrificial as Jesus calls us to be, we need God's power, strength, and Spirit shaping us.

- We draw spiritual power from God's Word (vs. 4) - it was written for our instruction in such things, it gives us encouragement, and in it we find hope.
- We find hope as we serve selflessly because we read in it the sacrificial example of Christ and how He fulfilled the OT promises.

We also find spiritual power to live selfless and sacrificial lives through prayer (vs. 5).

- The Holy Spirit has to be the one who does the work in changing us to be truly loving so that we can live in harmony with other people.
- In this work of changing us, God is a God of "endurance" - sometimes His work in our lives can be frustratingly slow! But He's patient with us as we learn what it means to live lives of love.

God is also the God of "encouragement" - we find inspiration and strength in His presence when we go to Him in prayer.

- Through His Word and His Holy Spirit, we are shaped and remade into selfless, loving people so we can live in harmony with others in "accord with Christ Jesus" (vs. 6b).
- Jesus' plan for you is to make you less selfish and more sacrificial so you can minister to and be a blessing to other believers.

The whole point of Paul's instruction on unity is so that the church can with, "one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 6).

- When the spirit of unity is at work in the church, the church speaks with one heart and voice and with that voice, we glorify the Father.
- When the spirit of disunity is at work in the church, the church speaks with many voices and hearts to glorify all the wrong things (which in turn, robs God of His glory).

Because of the glory that unity and selfless, sacrificial love gives to God the Father, we're to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us (vs. 7).

- How did Christ welcome us? Was it on the condition of perfection or spiritual aptitude? Was it only when we stopped being immature and self-centered?
- This is a call to practice Christ-like love and acceptance, without strings attached, to all people within the Body of Christ.

THE GOD OF HOPE (ROMANS 15:8-13)

When we stop being selfish and make ourselves servants of those within the Church, we become powerful instruments and vehicles for the work of God in the world.

- Paul points to this example at work in the obedience of Jesus.
- When Jesus, "became a servant to the Jews", He displayed God's faithfulness and fulfilled God's promise to the patriarchs (vs. 8).

The promise that God made to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) was that Israel would be a blessing to all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:3).

- Because Jesus was willing to be selfless and sacrificial, He went to the cross, died for the sins of the whole world, and made a way for the ENTIRE WORLD to glorify God for His mercy (vs. 9).

WHAT IF YOUR LIFE STOPPED BEING ALL ABOUT YOU?

- What kinds of ways could God use YOU to be a blessing to more people than you could ever possibly imagine if you simply chose to stop putting yourself first?
- What if your priorities became God first, others second, and self last...instead of the other way around?
- What could our church do in our community if we all showed up looking for ways to be a blessing instead of looking for ways to be blessed?

BECAUSE OF JESUS' OBEDIENT SACRIFICE...

...THE JEWS GLORIFY GOD AMONG THE GENTILES (VS. 9, Ps. 18:49)

- The mission and calling of God upon His people is for them to glorify His great name among people who are far from Him.
- When you live a life of sacrifice, selflessness, and love that looks like Jesus, you are singing God's praise, "among the Gentiles".
- Selflessness and Christ-like love glorifies God.

...THE GENTILES REJOICE WITH THE JEWS (VS. 10, DEUT. 32:43)

- Because of Jesus' selfless sacrifice, the nations of the world were given an invitation to the family of God, and our selfless love to them will extend the same invitation.
- Selfish and unloving people typically make crummy evangelists because it's impossible to make yourself want to share the Gospel with people if you don't really love them.

...ALL THE JEWS & GENTILES TOGETHER PRAISE GOD (VS. 11, Ps. 117:1)

- The selfless love of Jesus made it possible for all the nations of the earth (which don't have a lot in common on the surface) to unite in praise of God.
- In the same way, unity is not possible in ANY group without a willingness for people to be selfless and sacrificial.

...CHRIST SHALL REIGN OVER JEWS & GENTILES (VS. 12, ISA. 11:10)

- Jesus humbled Himself, and therefore the Father exalted Him to the highest place where every knee should bow before Him (Phil. 2:9).
- In the same way, when we take the low seat of sacrifice, selflessness, and humility- God will honor us (James 4:10).

Living in such a way is so countercultural and it goes against EVERYTHING our flesh naturally wants.

- We must have hope and a trust in God to know that it will all be worth it someday.
- Paul prays that even as we choose the path of sacrifice and selflessness, we would be filled with joy & peace so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we would abound in hope (vs. 13).

TRUE GREATNESS.

- According to God's standards, the person who is truly great is the one who chooses an attitude of humility, meekness, sacrifice, and love towards others (Matt. 20:36).
- True greatness is when we choose to willingly serve, yield our rights, and take on responsibilities we don't have to take to serve others around us - that's what Jesus did.

THE CHALLENGE.

- If God has taken you through something difficult or challenging and given you strength, look for a way this week to use that experience to help those who may be weak or failing (vs. 1-2).
- When you serve others this week, LISTEN more than you talk - it's not about you (vs. 2b-3).
- Read your Bible every day- in it God wants to give you encouragement and hope (vs. 4).
- Pray every day - pray that the Holy Spirit would change you into someone who is loving, selfless and lives in harmony with others around you (vs. 5-6).
- Welcome and show love to those around you as Christ has welcomed you (vs. 7) - "the 15 and 30 rule".
- Simply commit yourself to selflessly serving others as you serve the Lord- when you do you become an instrument and vehicle for the work of God in the world (vs. 8-13).