

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Pleasing One Another for the Sake of Christ**

Scripture: Romans 15:1-7

Code: 45-112

Let's open our Bibles tonight to the fifteenth chapter of Romans. We're fast coming to a conclusion in our study of this wonderful epistle. But even though we are coming near the end, there is still great and rich truth for us. We're going to be looking tonight at chapter 15 verses 1 through 7, and this is part 5 in our series on the unity of strong and weak believers.

Let me just say by way of introduction that it's obvious to all of us and it really begs the issue to say much about it except by way of reminder that discord strikes a deadly blow at the work of God in the church. Chaos, confusion, strife, envy, jealousy, anger, bitterness, dissension, fighting, hatred, indifference to the needs of others, selfishness, a lack of sacrificial love, all of these things violate the unity of the church and therefore they violate the will of God and they cripple His testimony in the world. The loving harmony and unity of the church is of grave concern to God. And I want to see if I can't point that out to you as we begin our study.

First of all, let me just say that the unity of the church is the concern of God the Father...the unity of the church is the concern of God the Father. And just by way of background to that, in Psalm 133, a very brief Psalm, I want you to listen to the three verses that make up that Psalm. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity; it is like the precious ointment upon the head that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments." In other words, like a fragrant and beautiful and lovely perfume, like the dew of Hermon, the glistening dew of the morning that settles on that great mountain peak in the north of Israel, like the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forever more.

And here the psalmist says that unity to God is a sweet and fragrant and beautiful thing. In Jeremiah chapter 32, we find another reference to this in a couple of verses in that thirty- second chapter, a section dealing with the new covenant. In Jeremiah 32 verse 38 we read, "And God says concerning those people who some day will become partakers of the new covenant, they shall be My people and I will be their God and I will give them one heart and one way that they may fear me forever for the good of them and of their children after them." I love that, I will give them one heart and one way. That is one internal attitude and one external path of behavior.

One other Old Testament text and I'd like you to look carefully at it is the thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy...Ezekiel chapter 37. And if you've ever studied Ezekiel, you'll remember chapter

37 begins with the vision of the valley of dry bones, a picture of God's regathering of the nation Israel in final salvation. But I want you to notice that as the Lord looks ahead to the future glory of His redeemed nation Israel, beginning in verse 15, the Word of the Lord comes to the prophet and says this, "Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick and write upon it for Judah and for the children of Israel his companions; then take another stick and write upon it for Joseph the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel, his companions, and join them one to another into one stick and they shall become one in thy hand."

Now Ezekiel carried out a lot of object lessons in his ministry and this is another very unique one. God says take one stick and identify it as Judah, the southern kingdom, take another stick and identify it as Israel, also called Ephraim for the son of Joseph who became the leader of the nations in the northern kingdom, and identify it as Israel. Those two sticks represent the divided kingdom which was divided under Jeroboam. And take them and put them together and make them one stick in your hand because that's the way it's going to be some day. Some day God is going to take His divided Kingdom and join it back together in final glory.

Now taking such a stick is not foreign to the audience of Ezekiel. If you go back to the seventeenth chapter of Numbers and verse 2, you will read there that every tribe had a stick to identify it. And here God simply takes that same idea and joins those two together as if to say the day will come when God will join His people as one again. This to come in the future.

I want you to notice, also, Zephaniah, one of the minor prophets, chapter 3 and verse 9. There are only three chapters. It's right at the end of this little prophecy, and it says in verse 9 of chapter 3, again God looking forward to the salvation of His nation Israel, "For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language." A pure language, that is a spiritual speech, "That they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with...what?...with one consent."

Look at Zechariah chapter 14 and verse 9. "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth, in that day shall there be one Lord and His name one." That is all the inhabitants of the earth will hold up and exalt the one name of the one who is alone, the Lord.

And if we were to back up in the minor prophets to Hosea, the first of the minor prophets in chapter 1 and verse 11, we would read, "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, appointing themselves one head and they shall come up out of the land for great shall be the day of Jezreel."

Now in these prophecies we see that God has intended through the new covenant and ultimately through His design with the nation Israel to bring them together as one people. It is the same for the church. Just as in the future of the nation Israel, all the rebels will be purged out and there will be a wonderful oneness among those redeemed people, so it is in the church. And to see that we look at

John chapter 10...John chapter 10 and verse 14. Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd and know My sheep and am known of Mine," that is they know Me as well. Now listen to this, "As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father and I lay down My life for the sheep and other sheep I have that are not of this fold--that is they're not Jews, they're Gentiles--, them also I must bring and they shall hear My voice and there shall be one fold and one shepherd and for that reason does My Father love Me because I lay down My life."

In other words, it is God's purpose that Christ lay down His life to redeem Jew and Gentile and make them one people. That is God's desire. God's desire was to make of one the nation of Israel which was fragmented. God's desire was to take that one redeemed nation and the redeemed church and blend them together as well. In fact, in 1 Corinthians we find the consummation of that in chapter 15 and verse 28, it says, "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him--that is Christ--then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him that God may be all in all." In other words, everything will ultimately resolve in a great glorious eternal unity under God.

So what we gain from just looking over those Scriptures briefly is the desire of God that His people, whether they be the covenant people Israel or the new covenant people, whether they be Jew or Gentile, whether they be talking about the past, the present or the future millennial kingdom, it is God's desire that His people be one people with one heart and one voice and one consent to the way and will of God who worship one God who is known by one name. The unity of the redeemed is indeed the purpose of God. And that purpose, of course, ultimately finds its consummation in eternal glory and we are reminded in Revelation chapter 21 something of that scene. "A new heaven and a new earth, a new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a great voice out of heaven saying the tabernacle of God is with men, He will dwell with them, they will be His people, God Himself shall be with them, be their God, wipe away all tears from their eyes, no more death, no sorrow, no crying, no pain. The former things are passed away." And there in that eternal glory, all people are brought together under the Kingship of God forever and ever.

Now we know that at any given point in redemptive history, it is God's desire that His people be one. And that is their ultimate consummation.

Now secondly I want to mention that the unity of the church is not only the desire of God but it is the desire also of the...of God the Father...it is also the desire of God the Son. And I think that's obvious. In case you need to be reminded, John chapter 17, just briefly. John chapter 17 in verse 11 it says, Jesus praying to the Father, "And now I am no more in the world but these are in the world and I come to Thee, Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me that they may be one as we are." Over to verse 20, "Neither pray I for these alone but for them who also shall believe on Me after...or rather...through their word." That is not only for the disciples who then believe but for those who would believe in the future, including us, He prays. "My prayer," in verse 21, "is that

they all may be one as Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me and the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them that they may be one, even as we are one." And it is clear what the emphasis is. It is the particular concern of God the Father that we be one. It is the particular concern of God the Son that we be one.

And finally, it is the particular concern of God the Holy Spirit that we be one. The unity of the church is the unique concern of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 2 of Acts, we can see this identified for us, verse 4, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, Acts chapter 2 and verse 4. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And there came about, as a result of that movement of the Spirit of God, some very wonderful things. Go over to chapter 2 verse 38, Peter preaches, a whole group of people were saved. In verse 38, Peter says, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Now what is the result of that? Well, verse 41 says they were added three thousand souls who were baptized and verse 42, they continued steadfastly together in the Apostle's doctrine, fellowshiped, breaking of bread, prayers, fear came on every soul, many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles. Now watch this, "And all that believed were together and had all things common; they were selling their possessions and goods and were parting them to all men as every man had need." In other words, they were sharing whatever they needed to meet someone else's troublesome time. "And they," verse 46, "continued daily with one accord in the temple, breaking bread from house to house, did eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart," and so forth and so on. The Spirit of God moves on the day of Pentecost, people are redeemed and the first characteristic of those people is a very simply defined unity of spirit. They were of one accord, they were one in praise, they were one in fellowship, they were one in breaking of bread, they were one in prayer, they were one in doctrine and they were one in proclamation, they were one in sharing their goods. This was the work of the Spirit of God within them.

And we find more of that in chapter 4 verse 31, the place was shaken, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. They all went out and spoke the Word of God with boldness in verse 32, and the multitude of those that believed were of one heart and one soul. So where you have the filling of the Spirit in chapter 2 and then in chapter 4, you have the response of oneness. One mindedness, one heart. It is the desire, then, of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit that we be one.

Now not only one in terms of union with the living God, that is one in terms of new creation, one in terms of redeemed nature, one in position, but the obvious implication of that, that we also be one in practice and one in life and one in sharing all that fellowship impels us to share.

Now to see the sum of this, turn to Ephesians chapter 4 and I want you to notice four verses in Ephesians 4 that sum this up. Ephesians 4:3 says, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." One of the tasks primary to the life of the church is to maintain unity called the unity of the Spirit. And that unity is reinforced by the trinity. Notice, verse 4 is the Spirit's verse, there is one body and one Spirit. Even as you are called by the Holy Spirit, implied, in one hope of your calling. The next verse belongs to the Son. There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. The next verse belongs to the Father. There is one God and Father of all who is above all, through all and in you all.

In other words, since there is one God and there is one Lord and there is one Spirit and the desire of all of them is that we maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, we ought to be exhorted to do just that. This then is the will of God. This is the will of the trinity.

Because it is marked out as the will of the trinity that we have unity in the church, we find that a constant emphasis in the New Testament, and I'm going to run by some Scriptures very rapidly just to lay this in your minds. First Corinthians 1:19, Paul writes, "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among you, that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment." First Corinthians chapter 3, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ; I have fed you with milk and not with meat or solid food, for to this time you are not able to bear it, neither now are you able, for you are carnal for there is among you envying, strife, divisions, are you not carnal and walk as men?"

In other words, the concern of Paul was unity rather than the existing disunity. In chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, he goes back to the very same theme. He says in verse 12, "As the body is one and has many members and all the members of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ, for by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one spirit for the body is not one member but many." And again, the emphasis is on the unity of God's redeemed people.

In Galatians chapter 3 and verse 26 we read, "For you are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus, as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Philippians chapter 1 verse 27, it says, "I want to hear of your faith that you stand fast in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel." In chapter 2, he says you are to be like-minded, having the same love, verse 2, being of one accord, being of one mind. A very constant emphasis.

In chapter 3, he says in chapter 3 of Colossians, he says, verse 11, "There's neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, but Christ is all and in all.

Because of this, you are to put on love," verse 14 says, "which is the bond of perfectness and let the peace of God rule in your hearts to which also you are called in one body." Again, the same emphasis.

In 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 8 and 9, finally, "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one for another, love his brethren, be full of pity, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing," accusation for accusation, "but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you are called to this that you should inherit a blessing."

And then finally in the epistles of John, 2 John verse 4, "I rejoice greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, walking in truth..." Then in 3 John chapter...there's only one chapter, verse 2, "I wish above all that you may prosper and be in health," and he goes on to talk about that in verse 3. Then in 4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

Now what he wants to hear is that there is unity in the church, that there is a commonness of love and unity. He wants us walking together in the truth. Now this, then, is obviously a biblical theme. And all of these general teachings I've just put out without a lot of explanation so that you will understand the essential nature of unity in the church.

Now understanding that, let's go back to Romans 15. And what we want to see here is this, Paul realizes that one of the great dangers to unity in the church is the potential discord between strong and weak Christians. It is of grave concern to him because unity is of such grave concern to him. And we understand why now, don't we? It is the passionate desire of the heart of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And since this unity is so essential to God, Paul also finds it essential to teach the matter of unity as well. He knows that one of the great potential problems in the church is conflict between weak and strong Christians who can disrupt the unity of the church. So beginning in chapter 14 verse 1 and running all the way through chapter 15 verse 13, that entire section is all devoted to a discussion of the relationship between the strong and weak Christians.

Now we find ourselves in the middle of that discussion at chapter 15, let me read you these seven verses.

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification, for even Christ pleased not Himself but as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me. For whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning, that we through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and encouragement grant you to be like minded 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, wherefore receive ye one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

Now remember that throughout this entire section, Paul is emphasizing four major principles that must govern the relationship of strong and weak Christians. You remember what they are? First of all, chapter 14 verses 1 to 12 is the principle "receive one another with understanding." In other words, you that are strong and understand your liberty, be sensitive and receive with open arms those that are weak and do not fully understand their liberty in Christ. So the first principle is to receive one another, 14:1 to 12. The second one is to "build up one another without offending." And we saw that from verse 13 through 23, build up one another without offending.

Now the third principle in our text, which I just read, is this: "please one another with Christ as your example." So, receive one another, build up one another and please one another. The final point, which we'll discuss next Lord's day, is to "rejoice with one another," and that goes from verse 8 through 13, rejoice with one another in God's plan.

So, we find ourselves at the third principle, "please one another with Christ as your example." Now listen, beloved, it's obvious in the church that we have to be concerned with pleasing others, not ourselves, to make this unity a reality, right? If everybody is designing his life and his attitudes and actions and responses only to please himself, we will have chaos. And so it is incumbent upon the strong believer to adjust himself to the weak that he may seek to please him rather than to please himself. That's bottom line.

Now to do this, to please others instead of ourselves, requires several high spiritual motives. And I've listed six of them that take us through the text, let's move rapidly. Six spiritual motives...let me say this, if you don't have these, you're not going to be able to succeed at this. And if you don't succeed at this, you violate a very grave concern to God and that is the unity of His church. But with these motives, there will be unity among the strong and the weak.

The first motive, very simple, consideration of others...consideration of others. You can look along your outline as we go. Now consideration of others simply speaks in this regard, "Seeking to serve others with love rather than attack them with criticism." That's just basic. We know that. I'm not telling you what...I feel like I'm taking ice to Eskimos because you have more of this than you can possible use...you know this. This is by way of reminder. And it is not only by way of reminder because I assume you have forgotten it, but frankly, folks, I know you have forgotten it because I hear things and I know that there are very inconsiderate things said and I know there are people who seek not to serve others with love but to attack them with criticism. I mean, this is just how it is.

In recent days, one of the pastors of our church came to me and said, "I think we're going to be in grave trouble in the future if we don't stop some of these personal attacks that are going on within our church fellowship." This is not something we don't know, it's something we don't apply.

Now what do we have in verse 1? "We then that are strong ought to bear the weakness, or the affirmities of the weak," we'll stop at that point. Now the statement here is made to those that are strong, and here in verse 1 Paul summarizes everything he's been saying in chapter 14. He sums it all up. He already said in verses 1 to 12, "Receive one another with understanding." And you remember his points? Because the Lord receives each, because the Lord sustains each, because the Lord is sovereign over each, and because the Lord will judge each. So you need to receive each. Then in verses 13 to 23, he said to build up one another without offending. And he went through a little list. Don't cause them to stumble, don't grieve them, don't devastate them, don't cause the witness of Christ to be forfeited, don't pull down the work of God and don't flaunt your liberty. All right, he says in summary in verse 1, then we that are strong ought to bear with the weaknesses of the weak.

Now who is he talking about when he talks about weak and strong? Let me just give you a brief review, we've done this several times, but just for those who may not have been here. A strong believer...it's not talking so much about just spiritual growth, although that's part of it, a strong believer is a believer who understands his liberty. He understands what he is free to do. For example, in that culture he understands he's free to eat pork, even though the Mosaic law forbid it because in Christ that law is set aside. He's free to do whatever he wants to do any day of the week, he isn't bound by sabbath law. He no longer has to be controlled and all of his life chartered by the course of the tradition of the Jews, or by the Old Testament ritual and ceremonies. He no longer has to observe feasts and new moons and sabbaths and dietary laws and clothing laws and all those external things...they're all gone.

If he's a Gentile, he knows that it doesn't matter if he eats meat that was once offered to an idol because an idol is nothing anyway, he's completely free to do that. Anything that is a thing, he is free to use. He is free to be blessed by. Things are not a problem. There's nothing forbidden anymore in that sense.

So the strong believer, he can have a ham sandwich, he can eat a pork chop, he can eat meat offered to idols, he can take a long hike with his family on the sabbath and it doesn't bother his conscience at all. But a weak believer is one who having come out of those kinds of backgrounds doesn't yet feel the liberty to do that. He may be a Jew who doesn't feel the liberty to violate the sabbath, he doesn't feel the liberty to eat certain meats, he doesn't feel the liberty to break some festival or feast day. Or maybe he's a Gentile who doesn't feel the liberty to eat meat that was once offered to an idol and is now sold in the marketplace. He can't handle that because it conjures up all the past. And so he doesn't understand that liberty and the problem in the church comes when the strong believers who understand their freedom flaunt that freedom to the abuse of a weak believer who does not yet understand that freedom. And consequently we devastate them, we grieve them, we make them stumble, we forfeit our witness, we pull down the work of God because they go

backwards not forward in their spiritual growth when we flaunt our liberty.

So the injunction comes to the strong believer to set aside his liberty and bear with the weakness of the weak. And do so with love as a privilege. Now we know there are no religious taboos, we know that, we don't have to fear that. We don't have to pay any attention to old religious ceremonies, but some people are still bound by that. And we need to be patient until they can grow away from those taboos. And this is the attitude of consideration of others. And this is the first attitude that we must have if we are going to please someone else. We consider them before ourselves. To put it in Philippians 2 language, "Let each man look not on his own things, but on the things of others." Let us be preoccupied with those things which would distress others. When someone struggles with something that you feel is right but they feel is wrong, unless they are wrong in a biblical sense, unless they are violating a biblical truth and they need direct instruction, and by the way, don't let anybody bind on you something that is forbidden in the Scripture, but if it's a neutral thing, be patient that they might grow to understand their freedom. And we've been through that in great detail, that's just by way of reminder.

So the word "ought" here is a very strong word, it means to be a debtor, it is used in Romans 14 where Paul says I'm a debtor to the Jew and the Greek and so forth in preaching the gospel. So we have a debt and our debt is to bear bastazois used 25 times in the New Testament, and I want you to get the meaning cause it can be missed. I've heard more people say, "Well, we'll bear with you," which means we'll sort of impatiently endure your inadequacy. But it is not the idea of intolerance, or even tolerance, it is not the idea of just sort of bearing along with someone's infirmity, it is the word which means to get under and carry the load. It is used of carrying something, shouldering a burden. In Galatians chapter 6 it talks about bearing one another's burden, it means to get underneath and put it on your shoulders.

For example, the same term, bastazois used in Mark 14:13 and in Luke 22 of carrying a stone water jar or a pottery jar. In Luke 7:14 it's used of carrying a stretcher. In John 10:31 of carrying stones. In John 12:6 of carrying a bag of money. In Acts 15:10, carrying a yoke. In Acts 21:35, carrying a man. And in Revelation 17:7, carrying a woman. So it means to shoulder a burden. The point is, you don't just bear with them in some sort of intolerant tolerance, but you get under the load and you say, "I'll come right under there with you...I'll come right under your weakness and I'll walk along with you in this weakness until you grow to understand your freedom...I will not abuse you...I will consider you and I'll get under your weakness and I'll carry it with you." The prejudices and the errors and the taboos of certain people, we need to carry. We need to come alongside and nurture them along.

That's what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians, in part of course, in 1 Corinthians 9 when he said, "I am free from all men, I know my freedoms, but I made myself servant to all that I might gain the more." And in verse 22, "To the weak I became as weak that I might gain the weak." And the principle there, although that is in a different context, is the same. If we're going to gain the weak it is by getting

under the load and saying I'll live under that load with you and we'll carry it together until you're free to drop that burden.

It's kind of like Romans 13:8, the debt of love is never paid. Owe no man anything but to love, and that's a debt you'll never fully pay because you'll always owe it no matter how much you pay on it.

Now somebody's going to say, "Does this mean we're to be men pleasers?" And there are going to be some sort of macho spiritualists who are going to come along and say, "Hey, I'm no man pleaser...I know my liberty and I'm going to live my liberty to the hilt." I'm not asking you to be a man pleaser, not in the sense of Galatians 1:10 where Paul says, "Are we men pleasers? Of course not." What he means by that, a man pleaser is one who adjusts the gospel to fit what people want, one who backs away from the sinfulness of sin so as not to offend. We're not talking about that, we're not talking about compromise, we're not talking about Absalom in 2 Samuel 15. You remember that account? What Absalom did it serves as a good illustration. Let me just take a brief moment to read it to you. Second Samuel 15:2, "Absalom rose up early, the son of David, who wanted, you know, to take over and dethrone his own father. He stood beside the way of the gate, got in the city gate and it was that when any man who had a controversy came to the king for judgment, Absalom called to him and said, Of what city are you? He said the servant is one of the tribes of Israel." In other words, where are you from, and so forth. "Then Absalom said, See thy matters are good and right, but there's no man appointed of the king to hear you."

Here come these people with their grievances to the king. He stops them in the gate. Pulls them over and, of course, he's the king's son. Boy, who wouldn't want to get an audience with the king's son as access to the king? And he sympathizes and he said, "Moreover that I were made judge in the land that every man who has any suit or cause might come to me and I would do him justice." Boy, that sounds like every politician's speech you ever heard, right? "And it was that when any man came near to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand and took him and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment, so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." He had an ulterior motive, he was a men pleaser for his own gains. That's not what we're talking about.

We're not talking about pleasing men by adjusting the gospel so that they want to hear it. We're not talking about pleasing men by ignoring their sin. We're not talking about pleasing men like Absalom in a self-centered way to attract them to us, we're talking about pleasing them in the sense of helping them carry a load of bondage they do not yet feel free to unload until we can walk long enough with them to convince them they ought to dump the pack. You understand? That's consideration. We're talking about non-essentials, taboos and scruples and preferences that are not necessary. So, the first thing is consideration of others.

The second motive that we have to have is disregard for self--disregard for self. And these are very parallel. This is to say seeking to please others rather than me. Very basic, the end of verse 15...verse 1 chapter 15, "And not to please ourselves." In other words, we don't use our liberty because it pleases us. I'm free to do this, I'm free to do that, I'll do exactly what I want to do. I'll flaunt that liberty. The criterion for what we do is not our own pleasure. That's not a spiritual approach.

I always think of the words of Paul that are so sad in Philippians 2. He says in verse 19 I'm going to send Timothy, then in verse 20, I have no man who is like him who will naturally care for your state. Then verse 21, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." That is a sad commentary. What an aching heart Paul must have had to realize that people in whom he had made such a great investment were now out seeking their own and not the things of Christ. That's not what God desires.

Now the bottom line then in Christian liberty is "I don't seek to use my liberty. I don't seek to flaunt my liberty. I don't seek to please myself though I may have a right to do that. I may be free to do many things, but I won't do them if they'll cause you to be offended and stumble and be made weak." Rather, verse 2 says, "Let every one of us please his neighbor," that is a fellow Christian who is close by. "For his good to build him up." And again we can see that he's picking up some of the same concepts that he had in chapter 14. "Let every one of us" is very emphatically stated, without exception, nobody gets off the hook, "but everyone of us please his neighbor." What for? "For his edification," that is the goal to build him up. And that's why back in verse 19 of chapter 14 he said we want to...we want to follow after things that make for peace and things with which one may build up another.

Now listen, folks, the obligation in the church is for the strong to understand their liberty to come in and get underneath the load of the weak and help to strengthen them, to help to build them up. We are responsible, who are strong for the spiritual growth of the weak. Now I'm not saying that we sacrifice God's truth for the sake of harmony. But I am saying that in these neutral things we seek to build the weak by setting apart our own liberty for the sake of strengthening them. The point is, if you flaunt your liberty, they'll be even weaker. They'll run the other way. The offense will drive them deeper into their own little ceremonial taboos. In order to bring them out of that, we need to be sure that we carefully and cautiously do what pleases them.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul writes, "All things are lawful for me but all things are not expedient, all things are lawful, all things do not build up, so let no man seek his own but every man another's." Same principle...same principle. Apparently some of the Philippians needed exhortation along this line and that's why Philippians 2, which I mentioned to you a moment ago, was written. It says, "If there's any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, any tender mercies, or compassions, fulfill my joy and be like minded," and he describes that. Verse 4...or verse 3 he says, "Each of us in lowliness of mind, esteeming others better than themselves." And then he describes

Christ as the illustration, have the mind of Christ who though equal with God with liberties and freedoms that are inconceivable to us set them aside, became a man that He might gain men. And so we have that same attitude.

So, first of all, the motive then is the motive of consideration of others. And secondly is disregard for self. Look at the third motive, it comes in verse 3. It's one that's very obvious...conformity to Christ...conformity to Christ. That is to say seeking to be like the Lord rather than demanding that others be like me. Seeking to be like the Lord rather than demanding others be like me. For even Christ, verse 3 says, pleased not Himself, but as it is written, or it's adversative, rather as it is written, the approaches of them that reproach thee fell on me. Christ did not please Himself, Christ took the reproach of God. Christ suffered. He did not please Himself. He is the example. Even Christ pleased not Himself.

Beloved, that's an important thought and we could take a long time developing the theology of that statement, but that would not be the intent of the text. Christ was not in the world to please Himself. If He had really wanted to please Himself and Himself alone, He would have stayed in glory and never showed up down here. That's why in John 17 He says, "Father," the first five verses of that chapter, "return Me to the glory I had with You before the world, take Me back." Verse 5, "Glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world began." Christ did not come to please Himself.

Just to track that thought, the gospel of John is perhaps as good a place as any and no doubt the best place. In John chapter 4 verse 34 we read, "Jesus said unto them, My meat, or food, is to do the will of Him that sent Me and finish His work." He came not to please Himself but to please His Father. Chapter 5 verse 30, He says, "Because I seek not My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." Chapter 6 verse 38, "For I came down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him that sent Me." In chapter 8, I think it's verse 25, they said to Him, "Who are You? Jesus said, Even the same that I said to you from the beginning, I have many things to say and judge of you but He that sent Me is true, I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him. They understood not that He spoke to them of the Father. Then said Jesus to them, When you lifted up the Son of Man then shall you know that I am He and that I do nothing of Myself but as My Father hath taught Me I speak these things, and He that sent Me is with Me, the Father hath not left Me alone," here it is, "I do always those things that...what?...please Him." Now that's the bottom line in the life of Christ. He did the things that pleased the Father.

And so, it is right to say that Jesus pleased not Himself. Christ pleased not Himself. In John 14:31 He says, "But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do." I do what the Father told Me that the world may know I love Him. Yes, He came to do the Father's pleasure.

The writer of Hebrews seems to want to make a major point of this. In Hebrews 3:2 it speaks of Christ Jesus who was faithful to Him that appointed Him...faithful to Him that appointed Him. In chapter 5 verse 7 it says of His agony in the garden, that in the days of His flesh when He had offered up prayers and supplication with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death and was heard in that He feared, though He were a Son yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered. He called out to the Father, cried out for deliverance, cried out that the Father might remove the cup from Him. The Father chose not to do that. And Christ was perfectly content to resign to the Father's will. In fact, Luke 22:42, I think it is, He said, "Father, not My will but...what?...Thine be done." So He came not to please Himself but to please His Father. And He is our pattern. He bore so much for the sake of the Father. He bore so much for the sake even of the elect.

He also claimed to have come that ultimately in pleasing the Father He would also please us and bless us. No one compelled Jesus. He says in John 10:17 and 28, "No man takes My life from Me, I lie...I lay it down by Myself. I have power to lay it down, I have power to take it up."

So, the example, beloved, that we have as Christians in this matter of maintaining the unity of the church is that each of us is to be concerned with conformity to Christ. And conformity to Christ means we seek to be like Him rather than to make everyone be like us. And being like Him means that we do not do that which pleases us but rather we do that which pleases others.

Look for a moment at Psalm 69 because that's what he quotes in this verse. The reproaches that fall on thee fall on Me, that's from Psalm 69. And just briefly to draw it to your attention. Psalm 69:9, he says...and this is a Messianic Psalm, much of it touches on the Messiah and His agony. Back in verse 4, "They that hate Me without a cause," no doubt speaks of the hatred of the Lord Jesus Christ. "A stranger to My brethren," verse 8 and "an alien to My mother's children." "He came unto His own and His own received Him not," and so forth. It speaks about even the betrayal of Christ in this particular passage. It talks about His agony. It talks about, I believe, His trial in the garden, verse 16 down through maybe verse 20 or so. It talks in verse 21, they gave Me vinegar for My food and in My thirst...gall for My food and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink. Now there were...there are many aspects of the Messiah here.

But one of them in verse 9 is that the reproaches that were given to God are also fallen on Him. In other words, in pleasing the Father, Christ receives reproach, that is slander, that is false accusation, that is to suffer insults. And He suffered the same insults God suffered because He represented God. Because men hate God, they hated the one who revealed God. Because they hated the holiness of God, they hated the holiness of Jesus Christ.

Now this willingness to please God even though it meant reproach and suffering and insult and slander and death is the key to the Christian's attitude. Christ was willing to endure all of this, even the reproaches that fell on God Himself, He bore those reproaches for the sake of doing the Father's will. He was really indifferent to His own deprivation. He was indifferent to His own pain. He was indifferent to His own agony. And He who bears all of this pain for the sake of pleasing the Father is our example. Rather than running out to please ourselves, we should follow the pattern of Christ and be willing to suffer anything in pleasing another. He set aside all of His divine rights to be subject to the Father and to suffer for the sake of sinners to bring us to God. Can we do less for a fellow Christian? Back to 1 John 2:6, "If we say we abide in Him, we ought to walk as He walked." If you say you're a Christian, you ought to have the attitude Christ had.

So, the right motives then are consideration for others, disregard of self and conformity to Christ. Then notice this, and these are very simple ones, fourthly, submission to Scripture...submission to Scripture. And he makes an interesting transition here, quoting Psalm 69 he then sort of justifies that quote by saying, "For whatever things were written in earlier times," that is a reference to the Old Testament, "whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." And this is to say that we are to be seeking to find fulfillment in the Word of God rather than personal aims. We ought to conform to what the Word of God teaches.

In this brief justification for using the Old Testament Psalm, Paul gives the value of the Scripture...the value of the Scripture. Whatever things were written in earlier times is a reference to the Old Testament. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," and so forth. You know it in 2 Peter 1:21, the Old Testament. Whatever was written in the Old Testament was written for our learning. Now listen carefully. Old Testament Scripture was written for New Testament people. It is not a dead book. It is a book that is written for our learning. First Corinthians 10 verses 6 and 11 say it is to provide examples for us...examples for us, patterns for us. Paul said to Timothy, "All Scripture," and he referred to the Old Testament, "is given by inspiration of God and is profitable." And he listed some of the things it profits for, "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works."

Listen, the Old Testament is profitable, it is for our learning. And what does it teach us? That we through endurance, hupomone, endurance and encouragement from the Scriptures might have what? Hope...hope. I believe that man needs hope more than he needs anything else. The goal of the Scripture is to give hope...hope for the future, hope for life eternal, hope for forgiveness from sin, meaning to life. God is called in Jeremiah 14:8 "The hope of Israel." God is the giver of hope. Psalm 119 says at least three times, "I have hope in Thy Word." Psalm 130 verse 5, the same thing, "I have hope in Thy Word." The reason we have hope is because of what the Bible reveals. Is that not so? Would you have hope in life to come if you'd never read the Scripture? Would you have hope? No, no hope at all. That's why in Ephesians 4 it says the Gentiles who have not the Scripture are without

hope in the world. They are without hope in the world. Hope comes from the Word of God. Without it we have no hope. We don't know about heaven. We don't know about Christ and His Kingdom. We don't know about the glorious reward that lies ahead. We don't know that without the Scripture. There's no revelation of that apart from Scripture.

But Scripture gives us hope. And this comes to us through two great spiritual realities...endurance and encouragement. Scripture tells us that we can endure any trial, that we can make it through any difficulty, any vicissitude, any struggle, any anxiety. And James, you remember chapter 5 there verses 7 to 11, "Be patient therefore, brethren," or be enduring, brethren,"to the coming of the Lord." And he goes on to talk about the farmer waiting for the precious fruit of the earth has long patience for it until he received the early--latter rain, be also enduring, establish your hearts, the coming of the Lord is near. Now that comes from the confidence of the Scripture. Scripture tells us that we have a hope and that we have the power to endure. The teaching of the Word of God allows us to patiently endure in this life, waiting for the hope that is set before us. And we could not patiently endure the trials of life if we didn't know...if we had no word from God about how to endure, about how to be secure. If we didn't know that we were secure, every time a trouble came along we might think we were thrown out of God's Kingdom. But Scripture tells us we're secure and Scripture tells us we have the power to endure and Scripture tells us why we are to endure, to be strengthened, to develop patience so that patience, James 1 says, can have a perfecting work so that we can be more useful to God and more effective in winning others. So Scripture gives us endurance to the hope.

And then along the way also encouragement, he says, paraklesis which is paraclete, one who comes alongside to encourage. It is the Word of God that not only tells us how to endure, but encourages us in the process.

So, the Scripture teaches endurance and the Scripture teaches patience. And those two things lead us to hold fast the hope that is in God and in Christ. We have that hope and that hope is anchored in the Word of God.

And Paul's point here is simply that we need to learn from the Scriptures...we need to learn from the Scriptures. I think this is one thing that we can draw right into our little outline here and say that a biblical mindset is the key to right behavior to the weaker brother. We need to know that everything written in the Scripture is written for our learning. It's all part of teaching us endurance and encouragement. Let me tell you something. One part of learning patience and encouragement is learning to tolerate weaker brothers. Those words are chosen carefully. We learn through that to be patient. We learn through that the encouragement of one who has to wait. And that's what the Word of God provides.

So, we would say then fourthly, we not only have the attitude of consideration of others, disregard for self, conformity to Christ, but fourthly, submission to Scripture. We have an attitude of submission to

Scripture. And we say to ourselves, "Boy, I want to use my liberty, I want to get along with my liberty, man, I want to use my freedom. Life's going to be over and I'm going to be inhibited by all you weaker people." And he says, "Look, haven't you learned through the Scripture that you wait for that hope with patience and encouragement as you endure? Learn patience."

Fifthly, another essential attitude is dependence on divine power, verse 5...dependence on divine power. Now the God of patience, and this comes sort of like a wish. I guess we would be safe in saying it is a prayer though its form is a little bit shy of that. I'd like to call it a prayer. It's a prayer sort of in the form of a longing that rises out of the heart. Now the God of...and he uses the same two words...the God who teaches you patience because He's the source of patience, the God who teaches you encouragement because He's the source of encouragement, may He grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus. And what he's saying here is I realize that you have to do this in the power of God. May God grant you this because you can't do it on your own. And, beloved, if the prior point has to do with studying the Word of God, then this has to do with its companion, prayer. And this is to say seeking the strength of God rather than human resources, dependence of God.

How are we going to be what we ought to be to a weaker brother? How are we going to build the unity of the church? How are we going to bear one another's burdens? How are we going to please each other? By consideration of others, disregard of self, conformity to Christ, submission to Scripture and then dependence on divine power. If we depend on human resources we'll be impatient. If we depend on human resources we're going to find ourselves too weak and so in prayer we depend on God. The God of endurance and the God of encouragement will allow us to endure those deprivations of our liberty and will encourage us even in the process. And may He grant you to be like minded toward one another. What that is to say is just to treat everyone the same, to be considerate of others, to mind...literally it says to mind the same thing among one another, to be concerned about each other. This is harmony and this is love and this is care and this brings unity.

And may I add here, as a footnote, that the issue here is not doctrinal unity. That's not the issue in this whole passage. It's not doctrinal unity. We assume that we have disagreement on doctrines. Some think this is wrong and some know it isn't. You have a doctrinal disagreement, but in spite of that, we're talking about harmony in relationships in spite of disagreement. So he's not asking here for a uniform belief because he knows that's the problem. There is not uniform belief. And where there is discord at the level of doctrine, then the strong--when you're dealing with neutral things--need to come alongside and in patience and endurance given them from the Word of God and sustained and operated in them through the power of God are able to bring unity even where there is difference of opinion. Only God can produce that. That's why...folks, we go back to the same thing in the church. The Apostles gave themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. It wasn't because they weren't sophisticated enough to know anything else to do, it was because those are the things that have always been the most essential things.

What about your prayer life? When did you last pray for the unity of the church? When did you last pray that God would make you to be one who as a strong believer could sustain the weak? It's a matter of prayer and submission to the Word and the conformity to Christ and disregard of self and concern for others.

And then a final point...and this one a great and glorious way to climax. The last attitude is glory to God. We should be controlled by a consuming desire that God be glorified. And this is to seek the glory of God rather than self glory. Verse 6, considering others, disregarding self, conforming to Christ, submitting to Scripture, depending on divine power for the purpose that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God. You see that? That's the point, that you may glorify God corporately, both inwardly and outwardly. And in case you need to know what God, glorify God even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is such a great statement.

Do you understand what that is saying? Jesus, every time He spoke to the Father, every time He spoke to God called Him Father except on the cross when He was separated and said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" We covered this in our series on worship, but I just remind you of it. Every time He spoke to God He called Him Father. And when you read in the Bible about God as Father, sometimes but it is the minority, sometimes it is referring to Him as our Father, like in the disciples prayer of Matthew 6, Our Father who art in heaven...sometimes in a minority. The majority of times that God is called Father, He is not our Father, He's the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the reason that is used to refer to God is to point up the nature of Jesus Christ. When he says, Paul does, "God even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," he is linking Christ in essential nature to God, therefore proclaiming the deity of Jesus Christ...the deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus repeatedly in John's gospel refers to His Father, refers over and over to His Father. John 5:17 "My Father works and I work," and the Jews sought to kill Him because He was making Himself equal with God. That's what He was doing. When He talked about God as His Father and He as the Son, He was saying we have the same essence. And so, whenever we have reference to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is a statement emphasizing that God, the true God, is the God who is one with His Son Jesus Christ. That is to say no man comes unto God but by Christ.

Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be the God," what God? "Even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." That God. And that is the only true God. Verse 17, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." Second Corinthians chapter 1, "Blessed be God." What God? "Even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." And it's not just in those places, those are only samples.

So, the point is this, God is the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is to say that God and Christ are one. The only true God is the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and that is to say that no man comes unto God, Jesus said, but by...by Me. There is no worship of God unless there is also a worship of the God who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so he says the purpose of all of this is your unity so that with one mind, that's internally, and one mouth, that's externally, you would glorify God. What God? The God who is one with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Summing it up in verse 7, "Wherefore, or consequently, receive one another as Christ also received us." Why? Why? What's the reason? To the glory of God. Listen, why did Christ receive you? As a vile lost sinner. Why did Christ receive me? Because He knew when we were redeemed it would be to the...what? To the glory of God. And as Christ received us, so are we to receive each other. He received us to the glory of God. We receive each other to the glory of God. Shall we not follow His example?

And what are the right attitudes if the strong and the weak are to please each other? Consideration of others, disregard for self, conformity to Christ, submission to Scripture, dependence on divine power and a consuming desire to glorify God not myself. Those are essential if we're to manifest and live out and enjoy and glorify God by the unity which is His concern. Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we believe in all...with all of our hearts that we have stood on holy ground as always when we open the pages of holy Scripture. We thank You for teaching us again and reminding us of things we have known before. And we thank You for the privilege of living to the glory of God, we who are so ignoble, so inglorious, so unworthy to have the privilege of living to the glory of God. It's a great marvelous and wonderful thought. And, Lord, help us to know that glorifying You is not something mystical, it's something very practical. It comes down to how we treat each other and how careful we are not to use our liberty but to set it aside that we may please one another with Christ as our example. Christ accepted us for Your glory and we must receive each other for Your glory. Teach us that, Lord, daily, that we indeed may live to Your glory and not our own for Christ's sake. Amen.

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