

Life aboard the Fellowship
Bear with One Another
Romans 15:1

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Introduction to Text: We began a series last week entitled “Life aboard the Fellowship” in Romans 15. After our overview last week, we are ready now to tackle the 8 imperatives (as I see it) that we are given in Romans 15. The first action is given to us in verse 1.

Before we read verse 1, I was thinking this week that somebody might have a wrong perception about this series of messages. A guest of First Baptist might think that this series of messages on fellowship implies that we have a fellowship problem. Actually, nothing could be farther from the truth. For the most part, our church is blessed by a very deep respect for one another and great unity. In fact, the best time to deal with a subject is when things are going well. At the same time, in an area like relationships, there is always room to improve.

In that spirit, let us consider the relationship principle given to us in verse 1.

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

Introduction: A little girl once prayed, “Lord, please make the bad people good and the good people nice.” Do you ever feel like that? I do! How to make good people nice is the subject of Romans 15. Christians sometimes are notorious for having the right doctrine and respectable convictions, but be very irritating (even abrasive) in voicing their opinions. The question of Romans 15 is, “How do we live with other Christians who persist in looking at things differently from the way we do?” In other words, “How do we get along with other Christians?”

Romans 15 is actually an elaboration of chapter 14. Romans 14 gives us two specific problems in the 1st century church, and then Romans 15 applies the principle in a more general way.

Principles for Keeping the Peace

1. Spiritual Humility

Both chapter 14 and 15 remind us that we are talking about disputes over doubtful things. Last week, we spoke about the difference between truth, conviction, and preference. Let us understand that the issue of Romans 14 and 15 and the issue about which we speak deals with convictions. We are not talking about absolute truths. As the text suggests, we are talking about these disputed things. But, as we know so well, sometimes we do have strong opinions about our convictions and preferences. So, in order to keep the peace, which is the goal of the church for the sake of evangelism, we must maintain spiritual humility.

The Key to this Principle: “Disputable things” and the possibility of being wrong.

In Romans 14, the disputable things regard two issues. One is on what foods to eat and the other is on whether some days are more holy than other days. Apparently this was a big issue in the first century church.

Paul gives them several good points of motivation to be careful about their judgmental attitude.

- Verse 4: “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls.” The analogy is that believers are servants to their master, Jesus. We cannot control someone else’s slave.
- Verse 10: “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”
- Verse 12: “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” We are going to give account of ourselves to God, not give account to God about someone else. It seems to me that we just as soon begin practicing that now.

2. **Spiritual Credibility**

I think one of my great fears about preaching is that I will sometimes be misunderstood. My words will be taken out of context. Someone will not hear the entire thought. In this series, I am concerned that someone might infer that we never call sin, sin. The truth is that this passage has nothing to do with that. Again, when we have a clear Biblical word about a matter, we are to stand on God’s Word and not waver. The pure sense of this text assumes that both sides are authentic believers in Jesus Christ. Not only that, the assumption of this text is that both sides are madly in love with Jesus and doing what they are doing out of that love relationship with Jesus.

The Key to this Principle: “Disputable things” and the irrefutability of a person’s salvation.

Don’t question someone’s salvation every time that they disagree with you on a disputable matter.

Sometimes seeing ourselves in a humorous way helps us to get the point.

Sometime ago I came upon a fellow on a trip who was carrying a Bible. “Are you a believer,” I asked him?

“Yes,” he said excitedly. I’ve learned that you can’t be too careful who you fellowship with, so I began to ask him some questions.

“Do you believe in the virgin birth?” I asked.

“I do,” he said.

“Do you believe in the deity of Christ?”

“No doubt,” he replied.

Could it be that I was face-to-face with a real Christian brother? Nonetheless, I continued my checklist. “Do you believe in the return of Christ?”

“I believe it is imminent,” was his response.

“What about the Bible?”

“It is inspired,” was his immediate answer.

I was getting excited. “Are you a conservative or a liberal?”

He was getting interested in me, too. “I’m a conservative.”

I asked him as my heart began to beat faster, “What denomination are you a part of?”

He said, “I am a member of the Southern Congregationalist Holy Son of God

Dispensationalist Triune Convention.”

I was excited, because that was my denomination. I asked him, “Which branch of that denomination are you?”

He said, “I’m a part of the pre-millennial, post-tribulation, non-charismatic, King James, one-cup communion branch.”

My eyes misted over. That was my branch as well. I had only one other question. “Is your pulpit wooden or Plexiglas?”

“Plexiglas,” he replied. I recoiled in horror. “Get away from me, you heretic,” I said, as I walked away. (Max Lucado in *A Gentle Thunder*)

3. **Spiritual Maturity**

The Key to this Principle: “Disputable things” and the ability not to please ourselves.

It seems that we always want the other person to give in, but what are we willing to give in? In this text we see that we must have a proper balance in 1) Keeping our convictions, 2) Not judging another for not having the same convictions as us, and 3) Not causing another to stumble by not holding the same convictions they have.

The implication of this text is that we must be willing to show restraint in exercising our freedom. The way this works is this: We ought to do the very opposite of what we really want to do for the sake of the others. Now follow this. For the Romans, Paul says that the meat eaters ought to be willing to not eat meat. The non meat eaters ought to be willing to eat meat. We ought to be willing to do the very opposite than what we really feel like is the right thing to do. Confusing, isn’t it? That is the essence of spiritual maturity. Still confused? At the very least, spiritual maturity is the ability not to voice your criticism. Oswald Chambers said, “A man who is continually criticized becomes good for nothing, the effect of criticism knocks all the gumption and power out of him.”

I think my favorite scene in our church right now is when I see in our Eleven:11 service a gray-haired Grandmother or Grandfather sitting next to their 15 year old grandchild. The grandfather doesn’t want to be there, but he’s there for the sake of the grandchild.

To be honest, you know what my least favorite scene is in our church? It’s the scene which I hear about much too often of a biting, critical, unloving remark being made about our Eleven:11 service. You know the kind of remark, I’m talking about. “Well, I don’t know why they have to have the lights off, why Steve takes his tie off, why the music is so loud, etc., etc., etc.” You know what you ought to be doing instead of criticizing. You ought to be calling out to God for the Spirit of God to fall on that service. There are some folks in that service that love Jesus every bit as much as you do!

(For the Eleven:11 service—You know what my least favorite scene is in our church? It’s when someone says something bad about those who don’t understand why we do our Eleven:11 service. When someone says, “They are just spiritually dead. They don’t understand us. They don’t understand what it is going to take to reach people today.” Believe me, there are people that you speak about that love Jesus every bit as much as you do. You ought to be crying out to God in thanksgiving for them having the vision to keep this church alive for over 100 years now.

You ought to be singing God's praises and thanking them for the millions of millions of dollars that they have given and still give so that we can do what we do.)

What now?

I want to close with four very quick points of application. Points to take home and immediately apply to our lives.

In the context of the local church...

1. When there is not a clear Biblical word, refuse all temptation to judge.
2. Refuse all temptation to flaunt your opinion.
3. Pursue Peace.
4. Pray for unity.

Evangelism always suffers in the absence of unity!

This Week's Assignment:

Make a list of what you believe to be the essentials of Christianity. Make a list of your convictions. Make a list of some of your spiritual preferences. Ask yourself what you can immediately do to "please another person" who might differ from you in order for there to be greater unity in our church.