

**I Am First Baptist Church:
I Will Not Let My Church Become about Me
Romans 15:1-3**

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November 3, 2013

Text Introduction: We return to our series called “I Am First Baptist Church.” The idea for this series comes from a book titled, *I am a Church Member*, by Thom Rainer. The book calls every church member to make 6 commitments to his or her local church. The first commitment was “I will be a functioning church member.” The idea is that as a church member, we must function within the body of Christ, using our spiritual gift. The second commitment was “I will be a unifying church member.” We discovered that at the heart of Church unity is our love for the LORD and our love for the lost.

Today, we consider a third commitment. I have listed it like this: “I will not let my church become about me.” Here is the way Rainer stated the commitment: “I will not let my church be about preferences and desires.”

Text: Now we who are strong have an obligation to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not to please ourselves. ² Each one of us must please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³ For even the Messiah did not please Himself. On the contrary, as it is written, The insults of those who insult You have fallen on Me.

Introduction: Preferences—we all have them. Are you up for a little experiment today just to make the point? You are going to have to be honest and you are going to have to raise your hand.

We will start easy.

- Do you prefer sweet tea or unsweet tea?
- Do you prefer McDonalds or Wendys? Or neither?
- Do you prefer summer or winter?

OK, preferences—so we all have them. Now, let’s make our experiment more difficult and more personal to our church?

- Bible Translation? KJV, NIV, Other?
- Seats in a church? Pews or auditorium chairs?
- Time of service? 9:45, 11:11, 11:00, 8:00, some other?
- Music? Only hymns, mix, no hymns, southern gospel, high church?

When I was a kid, the Burger King advertisements promised: “Have it your way!” The slogan was more than marketing, but a franchise strategy that the customer should get the burger any way he or she wanted. It was a strategy that worked, I would argue, because soon everyone would be forced to offer the same service. Those of you who own businesses know well that perhaps that’s the way business should be—the customer is always right, so you serve them.

Unfortunately, that mentality has filtered down to other segments of life, including the church. The result is not as good in the church. In fact, the Bible causes us to come face to face with the reality that when we ask the church to cater to our preferences, we have done exactly the opposite of the attitudes that Christ gave to us as an example. Remember Mark 9:35 for example. "If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." This seems to me just the opposite of the "me-first" mentality. Instead, Christ calls us to an "others-first" mentality.

First Things First

I hear someone already saying, "Well wait a second! Are you saying that we just live in toleration of everything, including sin?" To use the words of Paul: "No, may it never be!" That is not what I am saying and certainly not the implication of this text. So, what does it mean?

Both chapter 14 and 15 remind us that we are talking about disputes over doubtful things. In Romans 14, the disputable things are introduced and we understand that they 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.

We must learn to appreciate the differences in...

- Truth—Truth is found in the Word of God. Truth is truth! We cannot deviate from truth.
- Conviction—Convictions are based on the Word of God, but are most often based on interpretations of the Word of God.
- Preference—Preferences are just that—preferences.

Here's the point: We do not have the right, personally or Biblically, to impose our convictions and/or preferences on other believers. The inability to distinguish truth from conviction and preference is the source of most, if not all, of the disunity among believers.

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.

So, please understand...

It is certainly ok to have preferences.

It is not ok to make my church about my preferences and desires.

Giving up our Preferences

Giving up our preferences is the Essence of Discipleship.

The text says that “we have an obligation not to please ourselves” and instead “please his neighbor.”

The first reason that we are commanded to please our neighbors is because here is the whole essence of discipleship.

Let me give you two quick examples. Mark 8:34 records these words of Jesus, “Whoever desires to come after Me {that’s discipleship, right?}, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” “Denying yourself” is often the same as “pleasing another.”

The other example is perhaps the most famous story of all from Jesus—The Good Samaritan. Most everybody knows that story of the Samaritan stopping to help a man whom the priest and Levite had passed up. He bandages the man, brings him to an inn, and tells the inn-keeper, “Take care of him and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.”

What maybe we forget sometimes is the reason why Jesus told the story. He told the story in answer to a question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus first said to the lawyer asking the question, “What does the law say?” The man answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus said to the man, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” Jesus answered with the Gospel answer—a person’s faith must be in God, and that person’s faith in God is going to result in good works. It is not good works as the requirement, but good works as the result of authentic faith.

But then comes the question that leads to the story. “And who is my neighbor?”

You see why I am saying that “to please one another” is the essence of discipleship. It is an others first mentality while the rest of the world is living a “me-first” reality.

Think about the impact on your relationships if you lived with an “others-first” mentality. Think about the impact on a relationship if both individuals in the relationship lived with an “others-first” mentality. There are hundreds of different ways to apply this principle. What about the relationship of marriage just as one example? What if both you and your spouse lived with the attitude to do what was pleasing to the other. I dare say that all Marriage Counselors would be quickly unnecessary.

What about the church? There would never be any church conflict anywhere.

Giving up our preferences is Effective for Disciple-Making.

The second reason for the imperative to please one another has to do with disciple-making. The first reason has to do with being a disciple. This second reason has to do with making disciples. Notice the two phrases after the imperative. The first is “for his good.” This helps us to clarify that we are talking

about God approved things. We could not very well do something for someone's good and that something be displeasing to God.

The second phrase is "leading to edification." Here is the goal of the attempt to please one another—that the other person would be "built up." It is hard to build someone up when you are always tearing them down. It is hard to build someone up when you are not interested in what they are interested in.

Again, let's think about just one point of application. Think about someone's life who you would most like to influence. What about your child's life or your grandchild's life? The easiest way to begin to impact their life in a positive direction is to find some level of common ground. Do they like sports? Go do that with them. You say, "I don't like sports." That's not the point—you are to please them. Do they like music? Go do that with them? And, this may be tough—but it has to be their music if you are going to influence them. Do they like fishing? Find a way to have some common ground. I'm afraid that what we try to do is make them like the things we like to do and then wonder why we cannot have an influence toward making them to become Jesus' disciples.

Giving up our preferences is the Example of Jesus.

The final reason for pleasing one another is found in the example of Jesus. As powerful as He was, He gave up His right even to life so that we might have life. Certainly we can find then the way to give up our rights to our own happiness.

As we get serious about this, here is something of the potential. We will be maligned, criticized, and our name might even be defamed. That's what happened to Jesus.

Conclusion:

Is this an important message? I think it is. One of the great enemies to church unity and Christian unity is selfishness. Remember the song from the musical *Oklahoma*: "O what a beautiful morning, oh what a beautiful day. I've got a wonderful feeling—everything's going my way." Is that your criteria for a good day? Is that your criteria for a good relationship? This is not Jesus' way.

Listen to Jesus' way:

³ *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:3-11)

This is not easy. Let us pray for humility, wisdom, and grace.