

Life aboard the Fellowship

Please One Another

Romans 15:2-4

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Introduction to Text: We are in a series of messages entitled “Life aboard the Fellowship” in Romans 15. There are 8 imperatives (as I see it) that we are given in Romans 15. The first action is given to us in verse 1. We are to “Bear with one Another.” We learned last week that this is a general statement of some rather specific examples that were given in chapter 14. We learned that the meaning of “Bearing with One Another” is very much contingent upon the fact that all parties were believers and the fact that we were dealing with the matter of disputable things—that is, we are not talking about excusing someone’s sin, but rather we are talking about those matters of a difference of opinion with someone in a matter not specifically covered in Scripture.

We are given yet a second action to pursue with one another in verse 2, and the action is expounded upon at least by verse 3 and likely verse 4.

Text: ² Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. ³ For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “*The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.*” ⁴ For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Introduction: I want to share with you this morning what the text gives us as three reasons to pursue “pleasing one another.” Before we get there, though, I think it is important to get a handle on two introductory questions.

Two Introductory Questions

- How do we keep in balance pleasing one another and pleasing God?

This is an intriguing command isn’t it? “Please one Another.” Almost immediately, I hear someone protest and say “Wait, just a minute. Pleasing people goes against everything that I have always heard. I’m supposed to please God.” Indeed you are right. Paul said to the Galatians, “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:10)

Again, Paul said to the Thessalonians, “But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.” (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

So, how do we keep these two things in balance?

When pleasing another forces us to choose between pleasing God and pleasing the other person, we are to please God. When pleasing someone else forces us to choose between pleasing ourselves and pleasing another, we are to always please another.

- What does it mean to please another?

I really did set out to find the loophole in this idea of pleasing one another. You start out wanting to find some nuance in the word that would change the meaning from what we think it means. I studied every use of this same Greek word in the New Testament. (It really is not many—17.) This is what I discovered. There is no hidden meaning in the word—“to please means...to please.” It’s the word that is used to describe the feeling of Herod when his niece danced for him at his birthday. (Mt. 14:6 and Mark 6:22) It “pleased” him so much that Herod said to her, “Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you.” It’s the word that is used to signal the response of the church when the Apostles presented to them the idea of the selection of deacons. (Acts 6:5) The word is used in reference to what we cannot do towards God when we live according to the flesh. (Romans 8:8) We cannot please God and be in the flesh. You get the point!

How do we please one another? I think one way to deal with this question is to consider “What does it mean to please ourselves?” How do we want to be treated? Do we want someone criticizing us for our convictions? Do we want someone judging us for our convictions? Do we want someone else making false accusations against us? Do we want someone else talking to someone else about us instead of talking to us about us? All this helps us to see what it means to please another. In the same circumstances, whatever you would want, that is what it means to “please one another.”

3 Reasons to Please our Neighbors:

To please our neighbors is the Essence of Discipleship

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. You are learning in part about the first example in your Bible Studies this morning. 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.” Now, you are going to talk about this verse in your Adult Bible Studies this morning, so let me just set the stage for that conversation by saying, “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.

To please our neighbors 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? 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.

To please our neighbors 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)