

Glorify Together
Romans 15

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Psalm 146

This morning we will be going into Chapter 15 in which Paul begins to exhort his readers to follow what he has been writing about. As I pointed out last time, these teachings of Paul in chapter 13-14 are seen as being fairly controversial, especially to some more strict law minded individuals who can't seem to comprehend the Spirit's work through the conscience of the believer, or at least don't seem to be able to trust in the Spirit's convicting work in the life of the believer. Paul allows for the conscience in each individual to act as a guide in the life of the believer because he knows and understands that those who are Christ's have the Spirit and the Spirit works in the conscience of God's people.

I don't need to stand up here each and every week reminding you of your sin, reminding you to live in a certain way for there is one with a voice much louder and with much more authority than mine working in your heart and mind, convicting of sin, and guiding your lives. One thing I hinted at a bit last time as well, but maybe didn't express it as fully as I really wanted, is the issue with using restrictions, rules, regulations, and laws to bind an individual into righteous living is that we who do so may very well be giving a false hope. There is the fear that without the rules, if there are no defined lines and regulations then there is the danger that a believer might fall into sin. What if, by your rules and regulations you are doing nothing more than being a Shepherd to goats? By that I mean, you can have an entire congregation of people with an appearance of law keeping and pious living, but there may be many among them rotten and decaying at the core.

Allowing the Spirit to do its work in the life of each individual, may very well expose the fact that someone may not have the Spirit, so our focus isn't on how to live an outwardly righteous life, but rather it is to test to the Spirit, the good works or righteousness are through the works of the Spirit within us, not by following a confession, or church ordinance..it is the Spirit, and the Spirit only working in us to will and to do...out of love for the one who first loved us. It isn't my intention to preach this subject all over again but this is an important thing that needs to be grasped, and it is what sets us apart from pretty much every other Baptist, or Reformed church in this area. Believers are quick to condemn one another in their actions, in the examples given by Paul he uses, food, or festivities and certain days...we have some of that still yet among believers, and I am sure there is a whole list of things that people judge each other on that when it comes to the faith itself has little to no impact. Now, of course I am not talking about things that scripture clearly defines as sin, or sinful behavior, we have been instructed in how to deal with that, and what our relationship with that should be...what we are talking about here are things that are not inherently sinful in and of themselves, that some through clear conscience have no problems, while others may. Neither are wrong according to Paul, But that is not a license or excuse for sinful behavior.

But, if the Spirit is living in an individual, the Spirit will convict, there will be no excuse for sin because the Spirit will not allow for it. So, it brings up a good litmus test, does the Spirit convict you? A Christian is not a Christian because he is merely a good person, or faithfully follows some rituals, or regulations or goes to services regularly...a Christian can know he is a Christian by the conviction of testimony of the Spirit which indwells them. We have said it before, no conviction of sin, no Spirit, no true faith.

So, in light of this which is basically what Paul has been teaching in chapter 13-14, he shows in chapter 15, that we are to give leeway to one another in love. Again, I feel I must justify this, not giving leeway to sin, but rather over disputed things in which the bible has not clearly defined. We humans are quick to judge things by our own ideas and nature, but we are not the judge, it is God who is the judge and as Paul wrote in chapter 14:4, "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls." In the end, we are only accountable to God, and it is He who judges, and his judgment is far more fearful than mine, for it is his judgment that casts individuals into Hell. Which is why we are called to warn, which is why we confront each other with sinful behavior, the world looks at Christians calling out sin as being judgmental, bigoted, and I won't deny that there is definitely groups of those types of people who call themselves believers, but the reality is God's people are called to warn against sin and rebellion against God because the cost of that sin and rebellion is everlasting damnation. Therefore our calling, is not one of judgment, but of compassion not wanting to see another person suffer such a fate. Christ has been given not only as our savior who has taken the condemnation or punishment of the sins of his people to the cross, but he is also our example, we as his people are to love as he loved us, that is why Paul wrote, all of the law is summed up in this, Love your neighbor as yourself.

But that Christian love is not an approval of sinful behavior, knowing that a life of sin and rebellion against God destines an individual to an eternity of suffering, approval of sin is actually the opposite of love. You wouldn't approve of your child playing in the highway, knowing the dangers and likely outcome of that action, so you restrict, you warn, you protect your child from that danger, and you do so not because you dislike them and want them to suffer not having what they want, but you do so because you love them and want them to be safe. Christian love is something far deeper, and different than what the world sees or expresses, our love and concern for one another, and for our unbelieving friends and family members is born out of a concern for their very soul, that they may know God, have faith and believe, and rest in him and enjoy the peace that comes with that faith.

Paul has been talking about one aspect of this Christian love in these last few chapters, which is a sort of tolerance for one another as we walk through this life together. Remember that Paul is writing to the churches in Rome, he is writing to believers, so this instruction of how believers should interact with tolerance toward one another is between people of faith who each and everyone has the guiding indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Some may say that this sort of radical spirit lead teaching is dangerous, because it can lead good people astray into sin, but if you make that argument, then you would be arguing that is what Paul is doing here in this letter as well. In many ways I think that we should strive to be more and more a spirit lead people, looking less and less to liturgy, tradition, rules and regulations, but rather instead of trying to create righteousness through action, we allow the righteousness of Christ should flow naturally out of his children, for we who are born of Christ, have the traits of our father and it should be apparent. Far too often in our churches today we try to force those traits upon one another, and possibly upon those who are not born of Christ.

Even though I don't agree with the premise of the movie, the scene in Left Behind, where the entire congregation is caught up in the rapture, but the pastor remains has always stuck out to me. The message there being that just because someone appears religious, righteous, pious and holy... doesn't mean they are a child of God. The danger of how many have chosen to operate as a corporate local church body is they may very well have enabled a congregation of lost unbelieving people who do everything they should be doing on the outside...but are dead on the inside. Jesus called the Pharisee's white washed tombs, beautiful and reverent on the outside but dead on the inside.

These were the law keepers, these were the ones who did everything right, went to all the services, observed all the ordinances, obeyed all the laws, regulations and traditions...but Jesus said, they were dead, their righteous and good deeds were tainted by their arrogance and pride, being puffed up, haughty, proud and just a bit better than everyone else, when the reality is they were no better and needed a Savior just as much as the gentile sinner. As Jim preached last week, from the account in Luke, of Jesus being invited to Simon's house, and the woman who came and washed Jesus' feet with her tears and her own hair. Sadly, I think many who call themselves Christians, are Simon's, when we should all be that woman, knowing that we are each and every one of us sinners, and that if it was not for the grace of God there would be nothing redeemable in us. We were all white washed tombs and one time...but Jesus being concerned on what's inside, has cleaned out that rot, decay, and dead men's bones. If I was to extend the analogy of this, I would say that all of us believers are the opposite, we are like a house, run down, falling apart on the outside, not something great to look at from the road maybe not even desirable looking...but the owner of that house has spent all of his time and effort on the inside, making it desirable, making it beautiful because that is where he lives.

So Paul is imploring us, don't be looking at the outside of the house so much, we are all a broken people, but it is what God has done on the inside that truly matters and we should seek to understand and recognize that in one another, and not destroy one another over our perceived brokenness. Again I remind you, this is instruction for the church, for fellow believers, for brothers and sisters in Christ, I want to make sure that is abundantly clear, for many bad doctrines, and false teachers have arisen who taking these principles which are meant for believers and they extend them to unbelievers as well, both to the detriment of their ministry, and to the detriment of those under that teaching, having no real gospel message, no real urgency in addressing sin. Yes, the gospel is simple..Repent and believe, but many believe with no repentance, many believe in God with no understanding of their own sin. Jesus didn't say, believe in me and be saved....there must be repentance for true belief and understanding recognizes our own unworthiness, that we are white washed tombs who need Jesus to come and clean us from the inside. James wrote, in verse 19, of chapter 2. "You believe there is one God, You do well, Even the demons believe and they tremble." The implication here is there is two types of belief, a belief in merely God's existence, and a belief which leads to salvation.

Demons recognize God's existence, they know he is real, they know his power, but they do not have a saving relationship with him, true salvation is more than an intellectual belief in God's existence, it requires a repentant heart, that seeks after God, and a life that is marked by repentance and reflects that reality. And such a heart that seeks repentance, is granted by God to each and every one of his children who are born again. He has come in, and remodeled the inside to be completely new, and different than what it once was. And now that light, that love that he has given, is reflected outward toward those around us. And it is by that love, through the conviction and work of the spirit in the hearts and minds of each and every believer that good works flow, we do good because we love the one who has given us this new life, and we want to reflect that into the world around us, so others may know, and come to a real, and true repentance and belief.

Which brings us now to our passage we are looking at this morning. Let us go ahead and read it first before we get into it, verse 1..to verse 6. (Read Romans 15:1-6) There is a motif that runs through scripture about the strong, and the weak, which is the exact opposite of how the world sees such a dynamic. 1 Cor 1:26 "For you see your calling brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty.

The base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring nothing to the things that are. That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

There is also the prayer of Paul in 2nd Corinthians 12:7 “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And he said to me, MY grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

The story of David, a young shepherd boy sent out against Goliath, the Philistine Giant with nothing more than a sling and a few stones. By the world's view this would be madness, and a set up for a massacre..but God was with David and he prevailed.

Romans 5:6 “For when we were without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Hebrews 11:34-35 talking about those heroes of the faith who have gone before the Author writes, “Who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised, who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, escaped the edge of the sword, all these whose weakness was turned to strength.

The motif that runs through scripture is human weakness, frailty, inability, yet it is exactly what God uses for his purpose. So in verse 15 Paul says, “We who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, we must know, understand, and recognize that we are not always strong, and that often times we are also weak, we stumble, we fail, we make mistakes, and when forgiveness is sought, we should be quick to forgive seeing our own weakness. He goes on further to say that we don't do this to please ourselves, that is to build up our own arrogance and pride in a haughty matter. Any strength that we have been given in the Lord we should not hold over one another, nor boast in it, for it is not ours but God's that was given. When we went through chapter 14, where Paul gives the example of those who refuse to eat meat bought from the market, and those who have no issue. Or those who observe a day, and those who do not observe a day he says that the stronger should prefer the weaker. The beautiful thing about this is that either side of that argument would see themselves as being the stronger in faith, the ones who give up something for the faith, and the ones who see that thing has having no bearing on the faith and freely partake. Each side, is to give preference to the other creating a unity in the very things that often can cause division.

So when he says, we who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, he really is talking to all people for we are all strong, and weak in various ways. And we do this, because the goal is to edify, lift up, encourage, and help one another, verse 2. “Let us each please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.” IT seems to be human nature to want to tear each other down, pick out each others flaws, judge one another on our perceived wrong doings, but that is not who we are called to be, we are called by God to love our neighbor as ourselves, to build up one another, encourage and exhort to lift up and build up strength in our weaknesses. And Paul gives Christ as an example in verse 3. “For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of those who reproached you, fell on me.” Christ did not march to the cross with head held high in pride, no he took the shame and guilt of his people and bore it to his death, know that his death would bring all that God calls throughout the generations into the family, the God of the universe became like man, put on the frailness of mankind, in his weakness, he came to die for mankind in their weakness, so that they may be reconciled, and made righteous before a just and holy God.

And that is what it is all about, the salvation of God's people, being made righteous, just and holy before the righteous, just and holy God. Quick to forgive, as we have been forgiven, quick to encourage, to help, to exhort to lift up as we have been lifted up from the mire of sin to the very presence of God. We have in Christ the image of a servant, who came to serve and offer himself up for his people. We are likewise to be the same toward one another, having patience, and love, and a heart ready and willing to serve. And the beautiful thing about all this, is we have been given the Holy Spirit as a helper and guide who works in us through conviction to do these things, so it often times is not of ourselves but of God working through us to will and to do. Which is how God has designed in, so that we rest in him for our good works, and give him the credit taking none ourselves seeing it is God working in us through the spirit to do these things. And this creates a community of people, looking out for one another, seeking the betterment for one another, a sacrificial community willing to help each other in our weaknesses, and to forgive each other when we fail.

Having the mind of Christ, we come together has his people to worship and glorify him, a small lump of clay molded together for his purpose, for his glory. And the call continues to go out, repent and believe, set aside your sin and rest upon him who was sent so we may be forgiven and share in the very presence of God. I will end this morning on the words of Paul, in verses 5 and 6. "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant us to be like minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that we may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.