

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Bearing the Weaknesses of Others

By Dan Trygg

“Now we who are strong are obligated to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.”² Let each of us please the one near him unto the good, toward edification.³ For even the Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The insults of the ones insulting You fell upon Me.’⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.⁵ Now may the God of the perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus;⁶ that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Romans 15:1-6

Paul is continuing his thoughts from the previous chapter. We are to accept one another, in spite of minor differences of opinion or application. The main thing is to try to *not* put a stumbling block in the way of our brother or sister. ***We are to be building them up and encouraging them, not disputing about personal differences.*** Keep your opinions to yourself, if they are controversial, or if they cause others to struggle with their own beliefs. It is important to operate out of clear conscience, even if we are coming from different places. ***It is important not to confuse someone else and encourage them to choose to do something that is not in agreement with their conscience. To sin against your conscience,*** even if your conscience is poorly informed or “over-sensitive”, ***is tantamount to sinning against God,*** ...for *YOU*. This is because your conscience is your perception of truth. To choose to ignore *that* is to choose to ignore your own sense of what is right and wrong. In your heart, then, to choose to do something you are not comfortable with, is to choose to be inconsistent with your own values, ...and it would be as if you were sinning against God. Thus, Paul ends chapter 14 with, “But he who doubts is condemned..., because his action is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”

Therefore, Paul begins chapter 15 with, ***“We who are strong are obligated to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not please ourselves.”*** Note: this is the second time in this letter that Paul used the word translated as “we are obligated” or “we are indebted” or “we owe it”. The first time was in 13:8, where Paul said, “Owe no one anything except to love one another.” Love is the one debt that we will always be obligated to pay. God first loved us, and therefore we are obligated to love one another (I John 3:16; 4:11). What Paul is stating in this verse is simply an extension, or an application, of that principle. ***If we love, we will bear with the weaknesses and immaturity of others.*** “Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, love does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...” (I Cor. 13:4-8), ...or, as Paul wrote earlier in this letter to the Romans, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor...” (Rom. 13:10). ***If we are concerned for the well-being, peace, comfort, and good conscience of our brother or sister in Christ, then we who are strong*** (that is, those of us who have more maturity, spiritual health and freedom) ***ought to do what we can to help them maintain their good conscience,*** and be comfortable around us. We ought to be concerned to build them up, and help them mature, by removing every stumbling block we can, and to keep them in fellowship, where they can be encouraged to grow. ***To accomplish this, we may have to adjust ourselves to those who have less freedom than we have.*** They may have scruples or beliefs that we think are foolish or silly, ...but ***if we are going to fulfill our responsibility to Christ to build up the people He brings into the Body, then WE have to adjust ourselves in order to stay in relationship with these immature ones, and help them grow.*** We have little or no influence in the lives of people we have no relationship with. If we want to influence others, then we need to find a way to obtain and maintain relationship with them, in some fashion. If we *OFFEND* them, then we lose both the relationship and the credibility for what we believe. If we *WOUND* them, this is even worse. Then, we might justifiably find ourselves in the place where our “good thing” (or, what *we* say is a “good thing”) will be spoken of as “evil” (14:16). To those we rudely offend, or even insensitively wound, *WE* who really should represent Jesus well (if we really *are* mature), have become “bad news” instead of “good news”.

This lesson is very similar to I Corinthians 9:19-27. Paul describes how he “became all things to all people, that he might by all means save some” (vs. 22). Interestingly enough, though he mentions becoming like a Jew to win Jews, and becoming like those “without the Law” to win those “without the Law” (Gentiles), in this very verse, he says, “to the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak”. ***Paul, out of love and wisdom, chose to become like those he was trying to reach, so that he might remove any barriers, prejudices, or stumbling blocks, and “gain” them, or “win them over”.*** His focus, here, was not to win them to his opinions of unimportant matters, but to remove those secondary issues from the discussion, so that he could focus the discussion on who Jesus is, and what He has done, and hopefully

to lead these people into a relationship with Him. ***Paul adjusted himself to his audience***, and attempted to meet them where they were. He limited his discussion to important matters, so that secondary issues did not become a distraction. **How many of us need to learn this lesson! We want to talk about our pet issues, many of which would make no sense to a non-believer, or a novice in the Scripture** (I Cor. 2:14). We talk about conservative politics, about creationism, about end time events, or any number of issues that are *NOT* the main thing. People who are not coming from the same presuppositions, or world view, will *not* be able to follow your reasoning, ...even if you have good things to say! You will drive them away over secondary issues, before they come to know Jesus, ...or before they come to know the Jesus-in-you. **The main thing is to keep the *main thing* the *MAIN* thing! Do not choose topics that please YOU, choose to discuss matters of pertinence to the person you are talking to.** Choose to meet them where they are at, and remove any barriers or stumbling blocks, and lead them to Jesus HIMSELF. As they get to know Him, *He* will teach them, ... check them, ...confront them, ...challenge, ...stretch, ...and mature them.

“For even Christ did not please Himself...” (Rom. 15:3). **Who exemplified these principles better than the Lord Jesus Himself? He certainly did NOT please Himself.** He left the glory, incredible freedom and privilege of His place in heaven to become a limited human being, ...a lowly workman, in a poor, occupied country. He lived as a human being, with no special privileges. He was obligated to be like us in all things, so He could become an atoning sacrifice and a high priest on our behalf. He was despised, ridiculed, and mistreated, ...a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3), and He took the punishment that was due us. *He certainly did NOT come to please Himself. He did not live a life of privilege, power, or authority. BUT He did love and accept others! He accepted those that no one else would accept.* He did not turn away the worst of sinners, or the sick, the poor, or the powerless. Paul quotes briefly from Psalm 69. Here is a larger portion of the context: “Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; dishonor has covered my face. I have become estranged from my brothers, and an alien to my mother's sons. For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. When I wept in my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. Those who sit in the gate talk about me, and I am the song of the drunkards” (Psalm 69:7-12). **Far from “pleasing Himself”, Jesus experienced all kinds of ridicule and resistance, persecution and punishment. Yet, His entire mission was to pave the way for us to come to God. His love and accepting grace gave hope to hopeless people. That is what He wants to do with us!** As Paul would write to the Philippians, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this mind in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And **being** found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (2:3-8).

The quote from Psalm 69 was an example of many such passages meant to encourage us. In the NT, Paul would later write that *all* scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person of God might be fitted-out, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:16,17). Here, in Romans 15, Paul says that “whatever was written in former times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (vs. 4). God is the One who gives perseverance and encouragement, and **Paul prays that God would grant to us to be of the same mind toward one another as Christ had toward us.** TO NOT PLEASE OURSELVES, but to bear with the weaknesses, immaturity, foolishness and selfishness of others and *through gracious acceptance and patience*, we might have opportunity to build each other up and help one another come to maturity. **NOTE: THIS IS NOT AN EASY TASK. There is a good reason Paul says that we will need PERSEVERANCE and ENCOURAGEMENT, because it will wear us out, at times, and we may lose heart.** Having to “NOT please ourselves, but bear the weaknesses of others” will challenge us, and stretch us. It will drive us to God. **We need the persevering power of God to love in this way.**

Now, there is more than enough strength, perseverance, encouragement and joy in Christ, for those who are willing to walk with Him His way, to do His will. He is the Source. Those who are strong have discovered that, and if they are willing to walk as Jesus walked, they will find Him ever more precious and necessary. **THIS IS NOT the consumer church we see in our day. Paul is calling us to deny our preferences, and focus on the task: building up one another and discovering God's plan and purpose for all, individually and as a corporate organism.** God's purpose is that we might “one-passionedly with one voice glorify God together”. This unity and delight in God will stand out in a world of darkness, hard-heartedness and hopelessness. **Love, unity and joy will pave the way for the good news.**