

## Who Are You Trying to Please? (Part 1)

### Romans 15:1-3

**Thought for the Day:** Many of our struggles with others will be resolved when we choose to operate according to biblical priorities: Pleasing God first, others second, and ourselves last.

Have we unwittingly bought into the philosophy of our day? “Ya can’t please everyone, so ya got to please yourself!” (*Ricky Nelson, Garden Party*). Or are we consciously choosing to operate according to the biblical priorities of God first, others second, and ourselves last?

The controlling philosophy of our day says, “Me first! Other’s second, when I think it will work to my advantage. And then God, when I’m in a pinch and need some help.” Our fallen sinful nature is incredibly self-centered! But for followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bible presents an entirely different set of priorities: God first, others second and ourselves last. Following these priorities will go a long way in helping us to deal with “disputable matters” (Romans 14:1) in the church.

#### I. Living to Please Ourselves (15:1)

##### **1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.**

- The spiritually mature believers in the church have an obligation to maintain unity and harmony by bearing with, putting up with, the failings of the more immature believers.
  - Paul is not saying that we should tolerate and turn a blind eye to the sins of others.
  - “Failings” here are not sins; they are the undefined issues, the “gray areas” of the Christian life where the Bible gives no direct instructions about how we are to proceed.
  - It is the philosophy of our day that we must accept everything and anything that people choose to do. This is not what the Bible teaches.
  - Sadly, many Christians have bought into the moral relativism of our culture: There is no such thing as absolute moral truth. Nothing is right or wrong, good or evil, true or false. It is right, true and good, if it is right, true and good for you—but don’t judge others, if it’s not right, true and good for them. Truth is relative.
- The mature believers need to bear with the overly-sensitive conscience of immature believers that have not yet come to understand the freedom they have in Christ to no longer observe the dietary, ceremonial regulations of the Mosaic Law.
  - Those things have been set aside because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, but there are some who have not yet come to realize this.
  - Therefore, bear with them until they fully come to understand and appreciate these new realities.
  - Mature believers need to give immature believers time to grow up!
  - Mature believers need to provide a loving, accepting environment of support and encouragement for immature believers, even if it means setting aside some of their own wants and preferences in the process. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

## **II. Living to Please Our Neighbor (15:2)**

### **2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.**

- Verses 1 and 2 are two sides of the same coin: On the one side, we willingly choose to set aside our rights and preferences and, on the other side, we make it our ambition to build up our brother or sister in Christ, so they can grow to spiritual maturity.
- The goal is not to get our own way; the goal is to encourage and help those around us to grow and become more like the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The purpose of Paul's life and ministry was to win people to Christ and then build them up in their Christian life—to make them spiritually mature followers of Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Colossians 1:28-29)
- "There is a fine line to walk—the stronger person should not push the weaker one to change his or her ways before he or she is ready; neither should the stronger person pander to the scruples [overly sensitive conscience] of that weaker one by allowing such scruples to become rules for the church [legalism]. Instead, the stronger believers should bear with (15:1) and work to help the weaker believers in their faith; this will benefit the church as a whole. It is not always possible to predict exactly how acceptance and encouragement will help another believer grow, but it is certainly the way to build him up." *(The Life Application Commentary Series. Items in brackets added by Pastor Ray)*

## **III. Living to Please Our Heavenly Father (15:3)**

### **3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."**

- In this issue of "disputable matters", as in all issues of the Christian life, Jesus Christ is our pattern and example.
- Jesus did not live and minister to please Himself. Rather, He put the will of His Heavenly Father above His own. (John 4:34; 5:30; 8:27-30)
  - In our culture today, giving up your rights to accommodate the preferences and desires of others is a sign of weakness. But in the kingdom of God, it a sign of true strength.
  - As Christ loved and served us, so we are to love and serve one another—and in this way, we build one another up. (Mark 10:45)
  - "Strength is not independence from God, but total dependence on God. Strength in the church doesn't come from each believer being completely independent but from mutual interdependence. Truly strong believers are those who are willing to limit their freedoms in order to care for and love their weaker brothers and sisters." *(The Life Application Commentary Series)*

Ricky Nelson said, "Ya can't please everyone so ya got to please yourself!" But the Bible says, "Make it your ambition to please God and to please your brothers and sisters in Christ—for His glory and their good!" Which set of priorities will you follow?