

Sermon Notes

Romans 15:1-14
 “Self-Denial Towards the Saints”
 A Sermon Series on Romans
 May 5, 2019

Introduction

- 1) The Lord Jesus famously commanded: *“And He (Jesus) was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’”* – A harmony of Matt 16:26-24; Mark 8:34-37; Luke 9:23-25.
- 2) This self-denial is a fundamental part of the Christian walk.
 - a) Part of this self-denial is tempering one’s focus on (godly) earthly pleasures.
 - b) But the bigger part is about turning away from the world, sin, Satan and the self ***and to Christ.***
- 3) This is something our world has no concept of (and sadly few in the church).
 - a) We have this insane belief that the individual is the final authority and autonomous (i.e. no one, including God, has the right to judge us).
 - i) That we are fundamentally special and good people by our own merits and self-worth, and we are entitled to be happy.
 - ii) And we are entitled to define happiness by our own standards, regardless whether it’s forbidden by God’s Holy Law.
 - iii) If anyone gets in our way of our self-happiness then we are victims.
 - b) On every level, and in every aspect, this is contrary to Christianity.
 - c) All too often we in the church buy into this worldly/demonic way of thinking.
 - d) For example: How would you respond if a homosexual sincerely said to you: *“Am I not entitled to have love in my life? If I can’t have love what should I do?”*
 - i) Would you have the courage, charity and faithfulness to answer correctly?
 - ii) That no, we are not entitled to redefine love by our own perversions and lusts.¹
 - iii) But we are entitled to: Deny ourselves, take up our cross, and daily follow Christ.
 - iv) The world, of course, hates this message of truth, godliness and love. John 15:18-27
- 4) Let us, however, this day heed the advice of our Lord (Matt 7:1-6) and first examine how we should practice self-denial among ourselves (i.e. the church) by looking at Romans 15:1-14.

Strong & Weak – Romans 15:1a

- 1) In Rom 15:1 we read a beautiful, gracious, Christ-like command of self-denial, that *“we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength . . .”*

¹ Gen 2:22-24; 19:5; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Deut 23:18; Judg 19:22; Ezek 16:49-50; Matt 5:17; 10:14-15; 15:18-20; 19:4-6; Rom 1:26-28; 1Cor 6:9; 1Tim 1:10; 2Pet 2:6; Jude 1:7.

- 2) However, what does “strong” and “weak” mean?
- a) Is it literally about physical strength?
 - i) No, that isn’t the context.
 - ii) Though clearly physically intimidating a brother or sister would be a sin.
 - iii) This would violate the spirit of the Sixth Commandment: *“Thou shall not murder.”* Ex 20:13; Rom. 12:10; Matt 5:21-26; 7:12; 22:39
 - b) Does it mean weak & strong in the faith?
 - i) Yes, but not how you think.
 - ii) We moderns would think “weak” means someone who is weak in knowledge & thinking (biblical theology) or weak in actions (works of the Spirit).
 - iii) All too often we celebrate ignorance and laziness in the church, which is a sin. Matt 22:29; Ps 119; 2Tim 3:16; Rom 5:1-5; Gal 5:22-26
 - iv) It is true, however, we who are more knowledgeable and committed should be charitable and gracious to those who are new or immature in the faith.
 - Just as Christ is charitable and gracious to us all.
 - As that famous line from Isaiah about Christ: *“A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish”* – Is 42:3a
 - Or as Christ Himself states: *“Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”* – Matt 18:4
 - Paul himself teaches this in Romans: *“Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.”* – Rom 12:16
- 3) The meaning of “strong” & “weak” in Rom 15:1 comes from the previous chapter in Rom 14:1-2.
- a) It reads, *“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.”*
 - b) This is not about dealing with vegans and health food zealots.
 - c) It’s about a division between Jewish and Gentile Christians about sanctification.
- 4) Sanctification is the doctrine of a life-long walk of holiness by dying to sin and living for Christ.²
- a) This is Paul's main theme in Romans 5 and following.
 - b) It always follows justification (Rom 3:21-4), the doctrine that we are justified (declared completely righteous) when we repent (turn from the world, sin, self & Satan) and put our trust (i.e. faith) in Christ’s perfect righteousness credited/imputed to us, which we receive by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone.³

² Rom 6:6-10; 19,22; 1Thes 4:3-4,7; 5:23; 2Thes 2:13; Heb 12:14; 13:12; 1Pet 3:12.

³ Matt 16:16-17; John 6:28-29; Acts 8:22; 13:39; 15:11; 16:14; Rom 1:16-17; 3:20-21,24,28; 10:3-4; Gal 2:16; 3:11; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 1:29; 3:9; 2Tim 1:9; 2:25; Heb 12:2; 1Pet 1:5.

- 5) Jewish Christians believed that keeping the OT civil & ceremonial laws helped in their sanctification.
- a) Such as observing the OT holidays. Rom 14:5-6
 - b) Or keeping the OT dietary laws about clean & unclean food. Rom 14:14-15
- 6) Paul argues it is weak in faith to think these OT things are ways of greater holiness under the New Covenant. Rom 9:30-33; 14:3,5,17,20-23; Gal 4:9-11; Col 2:16-17; Heb 8:6,13; 9:10
- a) As Paul wrote in Rom 10:4 – *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”*
 - b) Of course, we must keep the moral law (ex: Ten Commandments). Rom 7:7-8; 13:8-10
- 7) So Paul is commanding we be gracious to those who are being zealous in their application of the Law.
- a) This is about a disagreement of theology between two well informed groups.
 - b) This is not pandering to lazy, uneducated Christians.

The Charity of Self-Denial – Romans 15:1b-2

- 1) Paul explains this self-denial in Rom 15:1b-2. We are . . .
- a) Not to please ourselves.
 - b) We are to please our neighbor (in this case fellow Christians).
 - c) But this attempt to please is qualified by “for his good, to his edification.”
- 2) The key aspect of self-denial is not to focus on the self, which is really hard.
- a) First, because we are fallen sinners who by nature love ourselves, which is a grave sin. Rom 3:9-18; Eph 2:1-3; Phil 2:21; 2Tim 3:2
 - b) Second, our world worships the self.
 - i) You can see that in the insane ungodly statement: *“You can’t learn to love unless you first learn to love yourself.”*
 - ii) As Paul has taught throughout Romans, we are fallen sinners under God’s wrath and we are called to repent and trust in Christ and not ourselves. This produces in us a love of God and our neighbor.
 - c) If you think you are entitled to have your neighbor be self-denying to you, and go so far as to demand it, you are by definition breaking this command.
 - i) This happens all the time, however.
 - ii) Ex: Christians who forsake the local assembly and then stew at home that no one from the church has called to see if they are okay.
 - d) There is a place of justice. If someone in the church is directly committing a crime against you (assault, adultery, stealing, slandering, etc.) you can complain to the elders/church. Matt 18:15-20; 1Cor 6:1-8; 1Thes 5:12-15
 - e) Our first instinct, however, should be one of self-denial and to focus on the other.
- 3) This focus on our neighbor (in this case fellow Christians) is for their “good” and “edification.” Rom 14:19; 1Cor 10:23; 14:3,26; 2Cor 12:19; Eph 4:12, 29
- a) This is means we are not to enable and encourage sin.

- b) God defines what is good, not man.
- c) To encourage sin is neither to love God or our neighbor.

Our Examples: Christ & Scripture – Romans 15:3-14

- 1) Paul gives several ways to focus on how to learn self-denial.
- 2) First, he points to Christ. *See appendix*
 - a) Paul writes, *“For even Christ did not please Himself.”* Rom 15:3
 - b) Remember who & what Christ is.
 - i) Besides being Lord, Judge and Savior, He is God.
 - ii) He is the Second Person of the Trinity.
 - iii) The Eternal Word of God.
 - c) Everything can be divided into two groups:
 - i) The Creator: i.e. God, He who is One in Three (Father, Son & Holy Spirit).
 - ii) The creation: Everything and everyone else.
 - d) The Creator has true privilege, entitlement, honor, authority and power.
 - i) He is the only one who can be truly offended by a slight to His dignity & honor.
 - ii) Because He is God!
 - iii) He created everything and will judge everything by His own nature (which is holy, good & just).
 - e) Yet the Eternal Word of God became human (i.e. incarnation). John 1:1-5,14,18
 - i) Talk about self-denial, humility and thinking about others first! Phil 2:8-11
 - ii) It is even more staggering when you know the purpose of this incarnation:
To be tortured to death for sins of the world to redeem God’s people.
 - iii) As Paul quotes David, *“The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”* Rom 15:3; Ps 69:9
 - iv) So all the sins we have committed against God have fallen on Christ. Is 52:13-13:12
 - v) The mystery is not why hell exists, but why there is heaven for us fallen humans.
 - f) If we truly grasp the Gospel how can we not practice self-denial, especially to fellow Christians!
- 3) Second, Paul points to Scripture. Rom 15:3b-4
 - a) He quotes the Psalms as authoritatively talking about Christ.
 - b) Knowledge of Scripture itself gives instruction, perseverance, encouragement and hope.
 - c) This is real hope, not delusional ignorance.
 - d) We in this church, I fear, have become somewhat lazy when it comes to a desire to learn God’s Word.

- 4) Third, prayer.
 - a) Paul prays for their unity: *"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,"* – Rom 15:5
 - b) When you pray do you frequently pray for the church?
 - c) One of the longest prayers of Christ we have recorded is for the church. John 17
 - d) This is something we in this church probably should work on.
- 5) Finally, Gospel centered worship.
 - a) Paul writes, *"so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."* – Rom 15:6
 - b) There is a place to debate theology and have different denominations in the freedom Christ has given us.
 - c) The saints in a local church should come together as one and worship, especially on the Lord's Day.
 - i) And the center of that is worship is the proclamation of the Gospel.
 - ii) As Paul states, *"Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."* – Rom 15:7
- 6) Romans 15:8-12 ties all these themes (Christ, Gospel, Scripture, Worship) together.
 - a) This should unite the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, though they have different views about sanctification.
 - b) It is because of Christ we are united and this should always end in doxology. (Giving glory to God.)

Conclusion

- 1) Mature Christians should always be charitable to those who are new in the faith or who are immature in their knowledge and theology.
- 2) However, this is not an excuse to be lazy, ignorant and stupid when it comes to the Word of God.
- 3) We are to be very charitable with those brothers and sister who are trying to pursue holiness (i.e. sanctification) but might differ about secondary things.
- 4) Yet all too often, in the name of charity, we enable the lazy and ignorant while being very judgmental of those who are trying to be pious.
- 5) Our foundation, hope and assurance is the Gospel.
 - a) And this should make us very positive.
 - b) We know the victory is Christ's.
 - c) And it should give us a zeal for knowledge, holiness and for the church.
- 6) As Paul writes, *"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another."* – Rom 15:13-14

Appendix – Jesus is God

- 1) Jesus is fully human Matt 24:32-41; 19:16-29; Mark 10:17-30; 13:24-37; Luke 18:18-30; Acts 1:7
 - a) Except without sin 2Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26
 - b) Jesus is God incarnate John 1:14 ;Rom 1:3; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:7f;
 (“in the flesh”) 1Tim 3:16; Heb 2:14; 1John 1:1-2; 4:2; 2John 7
 - c) The doctrine of the incarnation (the Second John 1:14; Rom 1:3; Gal 4:4;
 Person of the Trinity becoming human), Phil 2:7-8; Col 1:19; 2:9; 1Tim 3:16;
 however, is a critical teaching. Heb 2:14; 1John 1:1-3; 4:2; 2John 7
- 2) Pharisees wanted to stone Him because He claimed to be God. John 10:33
- 3) Jesus claims to be the Lord of King David. Matt 22:44-45; Ps 110:1
- 4) Jesus claims to have existed before He was born. John 8:58
 This is also what John taught, through Isaiah. John 12:41
- 5) Jesus claims equality with God. John 5:18-24
- 6) Jesus claims the Scriptures are about Him. John 5:39-47
- 7) Jesus stated that He and the Father “are one”. John 10:30
- 8) The NT describes Jesus as Creator. John 1:3,10; 1Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2
- 9) Jesus is called “Lord of Lords”. 1Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16
 This is a title used for God in the OT. Deut 10:17; Ps 136:3
- 10) The fullness of God is in Jesus. Col 1:19; 2:9
- 11) Only God is to be worshiped: Ex 20:2-6; Dt 6:13; 10:20; Matt 4:10; Acts 10:25-26; Rev 22:8-9
 - a) Jesus is worshiped by:
 - i) The Magi Matt 2:2,8,11
 - ii) The disciples Matt 14:33; 28:9,17; Luke 24:52
 - iii) A blind man John 9:35-39
 - iv) Paul 2Tim 4:18
 - v) The whole world Phil 2:10
 - b) Jesus claims that He is to be honored equally with the Father . John 5:23
- 12) NT writers quote OT passages about God and apply them to Jesus:
 Matthew 3:3 – Isaiah 40:3
 Matthew 21:16 – Psalm 8:2
 Hebrews 1:8 – Psalm 45:6
 Hebrews 1:10 – Psalm 102:25
 Hebrews 1:11-12 – Psalm 102:25-27
 Acts 2:21 & Romans 10:13 – Joel 2:32
- 13) Jesus is described with attributes reserved for God only:
 - a) Immutable (“unchangeable”) Mal 3:6; James 1:17; Heb 13:8
 - b) Aseity (“life unto oneself”) Ps 36:9; Jer 2:13; John 1:4; 14:6
 - c) Omnipresent (“all present”) Ps 139:7-10; Jer 23:23-24; Matt 28:20; John 14:23; Eph 3:17; Col 1:27
 - d) Omniscient (“all knowing”) Ps 33:13-15; Jer16:17; John 2:24-25; 16:30
 - e) Omnipotent (“all powerful”) Ex 3:14; Is 43:25; 55:7; Matt 28:18; Mark 2:5,7,10
- 14) John begins His Gospel by describing Jesus (the Word) as God . John 1:1-2,14
- 15) Thomas confesses Jesus as God, “My Lord and my God!” John 20:28
- 16) Paul writes, “our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus”. Titus 2:13
- 17) Peter writes, “by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ”. 2Pet 1:1
- 18) Many scholars think Philippians 2:5-11 is an ancient Christian hymn/creed to Christ as God.