

## ***Traveling With Paul Down The Roman Road***

*“With great power comes great responsibility” (15:1-3)*

Since our last Roman’s sermon, almost the entire season of Lent and Easter has come and gone. In a very real sense, we’ve walked with Jesus up the mountain of personal sacrifice, and celebrated Easter - the pinnacle event of our faith. Now we look downward at the task of living out that faith in the real world.

And that is where Romans comes in. Paul is writing to a Christian audience who have had to live out their convictions in an almost completely secular, and often antagonistic environment. They have battled opposition from legalistic Jews, unbelieving materialists, and even other Gentile believers. They’ve been confused about how faith comes, questioned what faith is, and misunderstood how faith should work in real-life situations. They’ve even found that simple tasks like eating, drinking, and setting their weekly schedules can have painful consequences within the Christian community.

**Romans 14:5-6** **One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.**

Because of this, Paul has been emphasizing the need to keep our focus on God in our attitudes and behaviors. Chapter 12 challenges us to use our gifts for the glory of God, even as we utilize them in our service of others. Chapter 13 explains that it is our love for God which should drive our behavior towards civil officials and all the “neighbors” whom we encounter. After all, He is the One we will answer to one day. And chapter 14 places the responsibility of patience and discipleship on the shoulders of the mature, not for the sake of the weak, but because “*we are the Lord’s.*”

In essence, Paul simply challenges the church to act like Christ’s church: pure in doctrine, strong in faith, exemplary in life, patient in fellowship, and supportive in hardship. As we soon see as Paul begins chapter 15.

**Romans 15:1-3** **Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. <sup>3</sup> For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”**

Many years ago, when our older boys were teenagers, we attended a Pastor’s Family Getaway sponsored by Focus on the Family. It was a wonderful time to gather with literally hundreds of other pastor’s families and be both challenged and blessed. There were a host of speakers, musicians, and counselors who shared at various sessions and at an assortment of events throughout those days.

One speaker who shared one evening was the popular Christian suspense author, Frank Peretti. That night, he shared a painful testimony of his youth, and the agonizing

bullying that he endured because of a birth-defect that disfigured his face. He could find no comfort, there was nowhere to hide from the negative attention he received. Even numerous surgeries couldn’t remove the stigma.

Until he was befriended by one of the big football players in his high school. He took Frank under his wing and acted as protector and support throughout the remaining years of school. Frank’s new friend didn’t get anything from it, in fact, it may have cost him in many ways. But he understood that he had been given size and influence for a reason...and Frank was one of those reasons.

We looked at our now sizable sons and smiled as Frank declared, “If God has given you stature, power, or social influence; He has also given you the responsibility to use it for the protection of those who are weak around you.” Jesus said it this way in Luke 12:48b, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.” And to borrow from Spiderman’s uncle, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Paul begins chapter 15 with a very similar challenge. He builds on every believer’s call to focus on God and live selflessly, and applies it outside the church. He looks around and specifically targets those who have power, strength, and influence. He states that they not only have an opportunity, but an obligation to come alongside their “neighbors” who are downtrodden and marginalized. He declares that it isn’t enough to simply help someone out of convenience, but that we are to, in fact, look beyond our own personal pleasures as we serve. We shouldn’t be “just pleasing ourselves.” As one commentator observed: “*To please only oneself is to disregard the needs of the weak and thus to fail in pleasing God...*”

But then Paul adds that we should do this “for his good,” and “to his edification.” This is extremely helpful in its common-sense application, and particularly in our current culture, for this is not a socialist statement. It is a divine command to act in such a way that is both morally good, and longitudinally edifying for the other person. In other words, what I do as the stronger person, must be something that is for their benefit (by God’s standards, and not for person gain), and for their eventual success (a hand up, not a hand out). What we do should be selfless for us, an improvement for them, and a means by which they are able to escape the hole they are in.

The greatest example of this is Jesus Christ Himself. He suffered not on His own behalf, but took upon Himself the sin of all mankind, while also absorbing the blasphemies targeting God Himself. As Paul quotes David: **Psalms 69:9** **For zeal for Your house has consumed me, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.**

“So devoted was he in his efforts to please God that even these reproaches of God’s enemies did not deter him...Christ pleased God despite the awful burden of the reproaches of all God’s enemies, all of which fell on Christ.” - Lenski