

Accepting Others

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 March 2019

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Now, you turned back with me to Romans chapter 15 and the first 13 verses. If you're visiting with us today, we've been looking at Romans for a number of months. We took a break at one point and we're now almost at the end of Romans.

We're getting towards the end. And we've only got another couple of weeks left to look at this great book. And we've seen that the first 11 chapters are really intense theology.

And we have then moved from chapter 11 onwards into more practical outworking of that truth. Now I wasn't here last week. Thomas was preaching on chapter 14.

And this is a continuation of chapter 14. So if I'm going to repeat everything that Thomas has said, then you'll forgive me. It's obviously worth repeating if that's the case. I'm not sure exactly what Anglic took on chapter 14, but this is a continuation of the argument from that chapter.

And really Paul, I think, is talking about two main concerns here. And it's to do as a continuation from the previous chapter, it's mainly to do with the attitude of the strong Jewish believers in the church in Rome towards the Gentile believers, those who had come in from outside of the Jewish faith and they'd come together under the Christian umbrella.

[1 : 26] Who they regarded, the Jews regarded the Gentiles as weaker Christians, as theologically not as astute and understanding as they were, not as mature.

And Paul is wrestling with this argument here, wrestling with this attitude that they have. And he's telling them that they have to think differently and they have to remember that they are one in Christ.

And it's a hugely significant and important truth. And he broadens it to apply to just how they think generally and how they respond generally to anyone at which we'll see those outside the church.

Now I think that that truth always remains relevant for us. And you need to think about how Jewish Gentile divide can be significant in a Scottish Presbyterian context and why it matters.

Well, I think it does matter because it's all to do with our attitudes towards other Christians and other people. Maybe you regard yourself this morning as a very strong Christian, Christian who's been alone for a long time.

[2 : 34] Maybe you feel you're in with a free church, bricks here, and that you've always been part of the church. And maybe when you see other people come in to the church or you meet with other Christians who are very different, then your attitude maybe to them is not what it should be.

If people come with a different understanding or with no understanding or if newcomers come into the church, people with no faith at all, maybe you regard them as being very different or having no spiritual pedigree.

And it's hugely significant how we respond to other people and how we welcome them and how we love them and how we are united with them.

You know, as you know, I was in the States last week and I was speaking about St. Columbas and I was speaking at a commission conference and about the church planting that we've been doing.

And of course, needless to say, those of you who know the story here will know the promises that God gave that brought me to St. Columbas, one of them being that I have many people in this city.

[3 : 45] Now, I still believe that promise is to be outworked. In our context, we want to see more and more people coming to faith in Jesus Christ and being part of the church here in St. Columbas.

But if that, when that happens and it has happened in a small degree, but we want to happen, want to see happening much more, our attitude to new believers is going to be very, very important.

And we mustn't have an arrogance or dismissal or a lack of concern for those who come in because they're different and because they don't know things or because they do things and think things differently from us.

So it always remains a hugely significant thing, our attitude to other Christians in our community and in the world, and also our attitude to other people.

So there's two principles, I think, in this passage that we'll look at quickly that are very significant to understand how we think about other people. The first is, with respect to our Savior Jesus, Jesus Christ didn't please Himself.

[4 : 49] Verse 3 tells us that, for Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written in Psalm 69, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.

So He didn't please Himself. That's what Paul is saying here. He's the one who's our example. The word pleasing Himself there just means He became a willing servant. He became someone who was, who wanted to win the favor of other people.

Now that's a really good description of that word, that Christ didn't please Himself. That's the essence of what Jesus came to do for us.

In His work of salvation and coming to humanity and coming to earth and taking on the form of a person, He did so not to please Himself.

You know, it's the essence of our understanding of Jesus. As a twelve-year-old in the temple, in the desert when He was tempted by Satan, when He went to the wedding in Cana, when He was confronted with crowds, when He was faced with a lack of faith among His disciples, when the crowds wanted much more of His time, when He walked with Judas, when He was in the garden facing the insults of the soldiers, when He was silent before Pilate, when He allowed Himself to be nailed to a cross.

[6 : 13] He resisted sinful selfishness. He wasn't here to please Himself. He was thinking of others, and He was resisting the glory of being God, and He put that aside in order to be our Savior and to be a Redeemer.

And that is the attitude that we are to take into our Christian lives, because this is about interaction between people. You know, you're all here, you're all sitting beside one another, and you'll all go into a working week of interacting with people, and He says, you are to be people who imitate Jesus Christ, who didn't live to please Himself.

And so the question goes out to us, who are, you know, can you consider today who you're pleasing in your life? Who is it that you want to impress? And who is it that I want to impress in my day-to-day living?

Think about it when you're criticising someone from a distance. When we're judging people's motives, yet we don't really know them. When we despise someone who thinks differently, theologically or philosophically from us.

When we reject someone who has not been a real Christian. When we do so to make ourselves look good, when we're building our own ego and avoiding this challenge of Jesus Christ, which is to remember that because He didn't please Himself, nor are we to do that.

[7 : 50] And it's in this great conflict within the church where the Jews and the Gentiles with it, at loggerheads with one another. They weren't united and under Christ within the church. And Paul is saying, look, let us, let each of us please His neighbour for His good to build Him up.

Because of what Jesus has done. And that's the practical outworking of the theological truth of the first eleven chapters of Romans.

As we know what Jesus has come to do, we are to please our neighbour for their good. And you see immediately Paul is broadening it not just to our fellow Christians, but to our neighbour.

You know that the teaching of the neighbour in the churches, and Paul is not just within the church, it's outside the church as well. It's a broader principle of grace. Yes, it must first be outworked within the gospel community.

Putting other people first and seeking their good, serving them in order to do them good.

[9 : 05] Think of their good rather than thinking about our own good. Wanting to build them up rather than seeking to tear them down, isn't it? So much of what we do is tearing people down.

I think it is becoming worse in our community with social media. I know, sorry, I'm banging on about social media again. But I went on to the evening news social media site this week because you may be aware that they're probably going to start charging exorbitant fees for parking on Johnson Terrace and around about here on a Sunday. And they're also going to have a city centre wide car free zone once a month on a Sunday.

So, you know, there are challenging implications for us as a church, for those of you who take cars. I won't, of course, be environmentally friendly. But, you know, those of you who are so lazy and can't get it.

No, sorry, I'm only, but you know, there's that challenge. And I went online and the comments. It was quite remarkable how quickly the comments following on from one another descended into absolute vitriol.

You know, people being vitriolic and horrible to one another based on what they were saying in their comments. There was very little politeness, there was very little respect for other people's opinions.

[10 : 33] There was a great deal of mockery and a great deal of angst and just nastiness. And we see that, don't we, again and again in social media. It allows us to do that.

We hide behind it and we can be vitriolic and mean. And that sometimes then spills over into the way we treat one another. We are to be different from that in the church. We are to treat, we are to seek the good of others and seek to please others to build them up for their good spiritually. That's a hugely significant attitude for us.

So we need to think hard about our church life, our family life and our workplace, our interactions and our attitudes to others.

Especially those that we disagree with, especially those that are different from us, especially those who are new to us, especially those who aren't part of our inner sanctum.

We need to think seriously about being outward looking. You know how often I've said, and this is a minor point, and it's not particularly, ultimately related to this, but you know how difficult it is if in the church here at coffee and tea, all newcomer might see as your back, because you're in a circle all facing and drinking tea and coffee.

[11 : 53] And they only can see your back. How difficult that is, how insular it can be. It's a very small point, it's a very physical small point. But as we look out, as we think of others, as we seek to please others, then we're moving beyond pleasing ourselves.

We're moving beyond simply looking for our own company. That's a very minor thing. So the first principle is that Christ didn't please himself, and we are to work that out in our Christian lives.

The second principle is that Christ accepted you. Verse 7 says that, you know, therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God, or accept one another as Christ has accepted you for the glory of God, or receive one another as Christ has received you.

It's a great and really strong word, and welcome and receive and accept doesn't really cut it. It doesn't express the depth. It means receive, but with a really strong personal interest.

It doesn't just mean anodding acquaintance. It means having a real concern and an interest in other people. We're to accept them by being interested in them.

[13 : 14] And that's, again, the outworking of our understanding of Romans 1 to 11. Remember the beginning of Romans chapter 12, which said, in the light of God's mercies, and that was a summary of the first 11 chapters.

So it's in the light of really what Christ Jesus has done for us and has accepted us, because of His grace and mercy, that we are to have that same attitude in the relationships we have with others.

Not just that we please them as Christ, or we don't please ourselves, but we also accept others in the way that Christ has accepted us. So our understanding of the living God who faced our death and our hell on the cross is fundamental to how we treat other people.

So chapters 1 to 11, deep, deep, meaty theology, affects how you act here, and how I act, and how I interact, and how we interact as people.

What we know, what we understand of Christ changes how we treat one another. It's fundamental in Christ. We know that God has accepted us.

[14 : 27] We don't need to try and look good with God to be accepted as Christ. He's seen us all right with the Father.

He's made things right with the Father in His just and loving act of sacrifice. It's breathtaking when we know the depravity of our own hearts and the requirements of God's law.

It's breathtaking. It's bone shaking to know that we've accepted by God in Christ. And He now wants us to bring praise to Him for the glory of God, therefore welcome, accept, receive one another, sorry, in Christ as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

Do you see the link between the first 11 chapters of this book? We bring, you bring glory to God when you accept, when we accept one another, when we do likewise.

That's a great thing, isn't it? That's what we're created to do in our marriages, in our individual family relationships with our neighbors within the church.

[15 : 39] We're longing to see an explosion of grace and conversions in this church, but nobody will stay in a church if we don't practice what we know to be true.

And we do, we do, we do practice that. And we want to practice it more, it's not soft theology, it's core theology, it's core truth. As we live out this pleasure of others and live out this acceptance of others, we will find a comfortable and good place to be together in Christ.

So there's two principles. And briefly, can I give two challenges as we deal with that, as we think about pleasing others and Christ accepting others.

And remember the context of the Jew and the Gentile here in Rome. And our own particular context. The first is the first challenge is to receive God's help. Because when you see that challenge, that is so difficult to do.

And maybe you think that in your Christian life generally. I know, I sometimes I despair at the demands that Christ makes of us. And the easiest thing is to just give up, to walk away or just to tread water.

[16 : 55] And yet in the challenges he says, when he gives us these principles, he says, well, I now challenge you first to receive God's help. That's great. He says that he doesn't ask us to do anything without his help.

So in verses four and five, he says, look, for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hoped, may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another and so on.

So the challenge is to receive God's help. Firstly, in the Bible, God's word that he speaks about here, whatever was written in former days. So every part of the Bible, the Bible Society know all about that.

Every part of the Bible has value. Not all of it is equal or as easy, as significant as each other part. But it's there to teach us. It's, and it's a great way to approach our understanding of the Bible, seeing it as an opportunity to learn about what God wants for us, not as a textbook, but as a living manual that God has given to us.

And he says, look, I'm the teacher. I'm the teacher here. God is teaching us. It's the primary way that he teaches us to be his disciples.

[18 : 14] So if the word of God has a little place in your life, then really, God has a little place in your life. If our Bible is shut, then our relationship with God is really shut.

It's not happening. It's impossible to know Him and follow Him if we're not willing to be taught by Him and led by Him. And he says he gives us the word of God for that.

And through that, he instills, what is he saying, endurance and encouragement. And that's repeated. You see that? It's repeated twice. He says it in the space of two verses. He says, may the God of endurance and encouragement give you endurance and encouragement.

So he's the giver of these things. What's the hardest for you as a Christian? Endurance. Keep on going. It's very easy to give up.

What's the most frustrating thing as a Christian? Discouragement. Usually from other people or sometimes from circumstances. And he says that he's the God of encouragement and endurance, and both of them come through His word.

[19 : 21] Isn't that? That's the great gifts He gives us. And that's why we go to His word for endurance, for perseverance, and for encouragement, to hear what He says. And His promises are tremendous, tremendous for us.

So there is a point here just to stop and reflect. If you're receiving God's word, the challenge of receiving God's word so that you're able to not please yourself and able to accept others, receive others with a real personal interest, have a care and concern for them that's beyond just a slapstick smile.

It's to receive God's help in the Bible and also from His Holy Spirit. Of course, verse 13 at the end, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Same thing about hope again. So the challenge is to receive God's help through His word, which He teaches us, and through the Spirit of God, the power of God in us.

He's the provider of joy, peace and hope as we rely on Him to change us and to make us more like Him, to do the impossible, to be like Jesus, to not please ourselves and to accept one another.

[20 : 37] But the great thing is, and I want to stress this, we're not left alone to do that. It's not just a do-it-yourself manual, the Bible. He asks us to do the impossible by grace, but He gives us the Holy Spirit to do it.

One of the things that I got the chance to do, I'm not going to talk about America, okay, but one of the things I did, I managed to do was to do some reading on the plains.

And I had a book that I've been reading, but I haven't been able to finish because it's quite heavy, and it's by Jordan Peterson called 12 Rules of Life. Some of you may know it.

Jordan Peterson is a clinical psychologist from Canada, and he's kind of shot to fame recently for challenging a lot of the assumptions of ideologues, both on the left and on the right, making them generally unpopular with everyone.

And he's not a Christian, and he's not writing from a Christian point of view, but he's writing from his professional and his academic experience. And it's interesting, his book does draw a lot from Christian morality and from what he says as the stories of the Bible, the myths of the Bible as he sees them.

[21 : 54] And he is giving what he believes are his 12 steps to a better life and rules for living. And I found as I read through, I've still not managed to finish it, flights beyond flights and everything. I still get, I find it pretty heavy going, but there's some really interesting pieces of advice in it, some really insightful, insights into human nature and into living. But he exposes, he speaks a lot about good and evil, and he exposes a lot about the reality of evil, but he has no answer. I don't find to the need for a heart change. It's really lonely advice. It's really isolating advice.

I read it and despair because it's still a counsel of self-help. He leaves people and he leaves his readers with no hope outside of themselves. He seeks to bring great hope from within themselves. And within that all, I think he hugely misunderstands grace, as this grace is just a kind of, you know, you just cover yourself with grace and then you live any old way. And I think he misunderstands grace entirely because what grace enables us to do is to recognize that we are indwelt by the power of God's Spirit to change. It's not that we're kind of using Jesus as psychological crutch and say, well, I can't do anything myself, so I need a savior and that's it.

And we just were saved and God forgives us and then we carry on living any old way. It's not that. We recognize the dependence we have and the dependence we need, but it's a dependence to change by his grace because of the salvation we've received to become like Jesus. And we've got the power of God's Spirit in us to enable us to do that. And so it's not a counsel of despair.

When you read the Bible and when you see the standards of God's Word, it's not to me to think, I can never be like that. I'm a hopeless, rubbish Christian. It's to make us see I need Jesus Christ to enable me to have a transformed heart. And that is hugely significant, I think. So it's to receive God's help. That's the first challenge. And the second challenge is to respond to God's command. We need to respond to God's command. And the core of that whole command in this whole two kind of chapters, he says in verse 5, may the God of endurance and courage be given, grant you to live in such harmony with one another and accord with Jesus Christ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the command is unity. It's to be united, to be of one mind, one accord, be together in Jesus Christ. It's the stuck record truth that we say here again and again. This is no Cinderella theology. Unity is at the very core of the gospel. And when we come together in worship, we come, we're to come with one voice. That's one of the reasons we sing.

[25 : 14] We sing with one voice. We sing together. It's part of the expression of our unity in Christ. That's why singing such a collegiate thing, it's such a great unifying thing, because we're acknowledging who Jesus Christ is. And we're saying with one voice, and we say at the end of the word, amen, with one voice, that this is the God who we worship. And it must be something that convicts us at ground level. It mustn't just be something we say outwardly. And it's not something, it's why corporate worship matters. It's the embodiment of being and belonging. It's where we get the enduring and the encouragement to keep going. And it is to reflect what is in our hearts, the unity that we have. So it's not an outward thing that simply we do ritualistically. It's a reflection of the inner recognition that Jesus has transformed us, that we are not here to please ourselves, and we also receive and love one another. We accept one another. That's a great thing in a church, that we accept one another. We're meant to be diverse. We're meant to be weak, or strong, or Jew, or Gentile, or Scottish, or English, or American, or Jordanian, or whatever it happens to be, that we come together and in Christ we're one. We accept one another with a generosity of spirit, with a forgiving spirit, thinking the best of one another, going the extra mile for one another, being servant-hearted towards one another, and in unity and so doing, we're glorifying God. See, that's why all these Old Testament Psalms are quoted here, in the end of that section. We don't have time to look at it, because that was God's plan, it was to be a united people, Jew and Gentile together, coming to a rich and poor, male and female, all coming together under the banner of the gospel. That was always his plan for the church.

That's what brings him glory when we see that. So we are part of a church where there are weak and strong, there's insiders, outsiders. Maybe you feel you're struggling to fit in, you may feel unwanted, you may feel isolated. God's purpose for you is exactly the same, as for the strong, as for the leader, as for the mature believer. It's together that we praise and rejoice, and we know we've accepted, and we know that Christ died by not pleasing himself, but by sacrificing and emptying himself for the glory of God and for the good of His people.

And I think we have to grasp that, because if we don't, we will not be changed, and Christ is about changing us for His glory. Amen. May God bless our thoughts on that passage.