

(PP1) Becoming human- giving glory x 22 Sunday 03 June_2018.

Background text READ **ROMANS 15: 1- 13.**

“Please others: not yourselves”. (And don’t forget to sing praises to God).

This year we are exploring what it means to be truly human. Also, I pray that we will seek individually and together in community (*) to bring greater glory to God by the way we live our lives in relationship to others and with God. (Chapters 1 – 11 God’s mercy to us through Jesus. Simply amazing – respond with giving glory to God)

Transformation through relating in Community (*). This talk will hopefully make us consider both our own strengths and weaknesses.

Indeed, Paul argues that the transformation of mind and behaviour that we need comes about as we make this personal offering to God (Romans 12: 1, 2) and as we help and encourage one another in the community of God’s people to do this.

12 v2 We are not simply to conform to the practices and prejudices of this present age – whether they manifest themselves in the world or in the church. We are to resist the outward pressures to conform (SUSCHEMATIZO – to be squeezed into a mould by the world) – instead we must seek to become what God wants us to be. Let God shape the way we think.

Within this is surely the understanding that human identity, purpose, meaning and satisfaction are **discovered in personal relationship with God BUT ALSO AS WE ARE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS.** The **priority** therefore is the community and the *common good* rather than me and my interests. We need to work at getting on even if we do not agree on everything.

- 15 verse 2 talks of not pleasing just ourselves but of **pleasing our PLESION or neighbourhood** – the people amongst who we live, in a certain place – our community (bigger than the TEV “brothers and sisters”. NIV “neighbours” is better but not in a confined English sense).

Paul calls upon the Christians in Rome to WELCOME others

(PROSLAMBANESTHE - to receive others) even if we regard them as “weaker” in their spiritual discernment and understanding, in this case about “eating and drinking” – religious customs or dietary practices. There should not be a sense of superiority – or looking down others. **In the house congregations of Rome, they disagreed over what foods you could eat and which holy days you had to celebrate.**

Paul identified 2 groups (*Chapter 14 and also ch 15*) that he called the “strong” and the “weak”. The strong (with whom he obviously identifies) have no hang ups/ reservations about what Christians can and can’t eat. They also felt that no day was more holy than another and every day belonged to God. But he also says that this group must not despise the weaker group that have specific religious practices.

This group thinks Jewish food laws, festivals and certain Sabbath celebrations must be adhered to and that the “strong” group of non-adherents is really not very spiritual. So, in Rome one group regards the other as lax and careless and the other regard them as rigid and inflexible. This is not the way of judging what is truly spiritual and of God’s Kingdom. (The set of morals and values that is pleasing to God).

Key verses in Romans 14 are verses 17 and 18. The Kingdom of God (which Jesus ushered in and makes possible) is manifest not in dietary requirements and keeping one day more holy than another but, ***in the righteousness, peace and joy that the Holy Spirit gives***”. This is what pleases God and

WE (the community – the collective) must always aim at those things that bring peace and strengthen (edify) one another. (Cf 14 Verse 19). Paul continues in chapter 15 this theme of building up one another and the relationship of the community rather than tearing it down. This is a key concern for Followers of Jesus – to build up relationships and community even though we each have various strengths and various weaknesses of attitude and behaviour.

Verse 3 even Christ did not please himself – he certainly didn’t and he is the one we should follow. He received insults and we will receive insults (*Psalm 69: 9 these are in fact insults intended for God* but they may be directed at us). Didn’t Jesus teach that all manner of insults may be hurled at us if we are concerned about righteous justice and the Kingdom of God?

Verse 4 learn from the stories of Scripture – don’t be taken by surprise. Sometimes the *“Spiritual Childishness of fellow believers can surely test our patience”* (David Coffey p218). We will need the spirit of endurance and to learn from the stories of our forebears. Remember:

- Abraham had superiority but was patient with Lot his nephew (Genesis 13: 7-9)
- Moses refused the privileges of his adoptive Egyptian family and sided with and identified with his slave Hebrew people (Hebrews 11:24-26)
- Esther risked her life to speak out for her people (4:16) and
- John the Baptist subordinated himself to the greater calling of Jesus (John 3: 27 -30)

They saw God’s wider and greater purposes. “Becoming human – giving glory” – IS ABOUT LEARNING AND BEING TRANSFORMED IN COMMUNITY BY GOD’S SPIRIT. **So, do you see yourself as “stronger” or “weaker”?** Where do you and I need to learn from others because we are weaker than them? Where can we gently teach others because on some point we are stronger than them?

Verse 5 God can give a Spirit of unity – as we follow Christ. As we are obedient to Jesus God gives “endurance and encouragement” when we want to give up. So that *“with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus*

Christ". **Verse 9** It was always God's plan that Gentiles as well as Jews should glorify God for his mercy! This is just the fulfilment of OT prophecies: see *Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117:1 and Isaiah 11: 10*. **READ 15: 13** – again here is reference back to the "joy and Peace" of the Kingdom of God and trusting in God.

(NOTE in the middle of writing to them about unity and working together with our varying strengths and weaknesses he does not forget the work of God and God's Spirit. He is praying for them and spiritually protecting them with his prayers and releasing God's blessing. He is relying on God to do the work of transformation and not just their human effort).

He is still calling on them to live their lives to build up their neighbour (longing that both Christians and non-Christians should praise God with one voice) and not just themselves. He calls on them to be like Jesus Christ and to seek to please others – to maintain unity rather than keep trying to win arguments. **This is all about differences of opinion and even cultural practices which threaten unity.**

Verse 1: the "stronger" will always have a responsibility to the "weaker" – but whether we are weaker or stronger, whatever line we take on various issues we should be concerned about unity above winning arguments. The "stronger" should help CARRY the load of those with burdened consciences (says Paul) Verses 1- 3 of chapter 15 of Romans are summarized by Paul as he writes to another group of Christians in Galatia. *HELP TO CARRY ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS AND IN THIS WAY, YOU WILL FULFIL THE LAW OF CHRIST. (6:2)*

We need one another.

HOW does this work when there are clear differences of opinion? By loving acceptance and listening with maybe a gentle challenge to see an imbalance of views and highlighting Kingdom priorities. Christ did not please himself and he was certainly insulted by others. Nor did he keep quiet all the time on the really important issues. Think what Jesus put up with and endured in his Passion but think also of the way he taught and challenged others.

SO. Do we see ourselves as the "stronger" or the "weaker" to use Paul's terms?

How can we prioritize the important issues and become less stressed by subsidiary or cultural issues ?

If we have any humility at all we will realize that we have not got the right balance on all issues – we are not pleasing God in every matter.

Learn from Scripture especially Jesus.

See the importance of unity and learning in community.

When we meet those we know are stronger – better at setting priorities then by learning from them. Where we are morally or spiritually weaker then being ready to become stronger by changing.