

## **When Christians Disagree – Part 3**

**Romans 15:1-13**

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I want you to look at Romans 15:1 to start us off. Paul says, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak,” and notice this phrase, “not to please ourselves.” In this verse Paul identifies himself with the strong—we that are strong. Paul is in that category of having great liberty and strong in the faith, and he’s saying that we that are more mature in the Lord, we that are strong in the Lord, have a responsibility—we need to bear the weaknesses of those who are weak in the faith. Paul is still talking, as I pointed out, about the subject of Christian liberty. I’m going to survey what we’ve covered, and I’m going to throw in some more information, so in this one closing teaching tonight, you’re going to get the whole gamut of information in the New Testament about how to deal with liberty in the Lord or what we call “gray” areas.

When the Bible doesn’t speak specifically about something being right or wrong and we have to go by our conscience and how it affects other people, we need to ask ourselves certain questions whether it’s okay for a Christian to do certain things. A lot of churches create laws and rules that are not in the Bible resulting in a legalistic Christian. I’m all for living holy lives. I’m all for being separate from the world, not thinking, acting, and being like the world; and God has called us unto holiness because He is a holy God, but you can’t create that by laws, rules, or regulations from the outside. That has to be a work of the Holy Spirit from the inside out in a person’s life. We find that in Christianity people come into different categories. Some people are very legalistic—don’t do that, don’t touch that, don’t taste that. You can’t do this, you can’t do that. They are known by what they don’t do rather than by what they do do... (I don’t know if I should say it that way. I’m probably going to hear from somebody for talking like that from the pulpit, but you know what I meant.) by the way they behave—how’s that? Is that better? They are known by the fact that they don’t go to movies, they don’t dance, they don’t smoke and they don’t chew, and they don’t hang out with those that do. I don’t do those things either, but it’s not because my church tells me that Christians don’t do those things. It’s because I don’t have any desire to do those things anymore because the Holy Spirit has changed my heart.

On the other side of the pendulum you go from legalism to license. The term that is often used is “libertines.” We go from the legalistic to the libertines. The libertines are those that are under grace and, “We are under grace,” but “everything is okay and, I can do whatever I want because God’s grace covers me and the grace of God abounds, and I can live however I want.” They have great liberty, but they are offensive to other people who have higher standards. You say, “Well, what’s the secret?” The secret is a balance in the middle called “liberty.” You have the legalist, the libertines, and those who walk in Christian liberty, but it’s liberty controlled by love. That’s so very important. Liberty that is controlled by love—love for God and love for other people. He really brings it together tonight in Romans 15:1-13, and, by the way, verse 13 brings us to an end of the doctrinal teaching section of the entire book of Romans.

What we've seen so far in Romans 14:1, (I'll just make this real quick) is that the strong should receive the weak. In Romans 14:3, the strong should not despise the weaker brother, and the weak should not judge the stronger believer. He tells us why—because God has received him (Romans 14:3), God will help him (Romans 14:4), Jesus Christ is Lord (Romans 14:9), and because we will all give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:12). In this section that I just covered on chapter 14, Paul's focus was on attitudes the strong should have toward the weak. But now Paul begins, in Romans 14 at the end of the chapter, to move to our actions and gives us four principles to live by. We should want not to stumble other people (Romans 14:13), we should live with proper priorities (Romans 14:17), we should want to live to build up others (Romans 14:19), and we should live with a clear conscience (Romans 14:22). Paul gives us one more principle to live by. When Christians disagree, what should we do? We're going to cover only one principle tonight under this one heading—follow Christ's example who did not please Himself. That's our example. Jesus Christ is our pattern and our example the we should follow who did not live to please Himself.

Go back with me to Romans 15:1 and we'll read down to verse 3. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." The most miserable existence on planet earth is a person who lives solely to please themselves. "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification," or building up, and here's the point, verse 3, "For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written," he's quoting from Psalm 69:9, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me." Paul the apostle comes to this point in the teaching on liberty and says, "What we should do is follow Christ's example." What was Christ's example (verse 3)? "For even Christ pleased not himself."

When you are concerned about exercising your liberty, you need to ask yourself six questions. (This is part of the throwing it in as a little extra. I'm not going to charge you any more for this. I'm just going to throw this in.) I'm going to draw from other places in the New Testament (1 Corinthians and another spot in Romans) where we ask questions about the exercising of our liberty. Here are the questions. Before you exercise an area of liberty in your Christian life that maybe the Bible doesn't really say you can't do it (it doesn't really say that it's good or bad—it's neutral, it's gray) ask yourself: Is it beneficial (1 Corinthians 6:12)? Will it help or hinder my walk with God? If I go to this movie, if I hang out with these people, if I go dancing tonight, if I smoke or drink that, or wear that or put that on, or listen to this music, is it beneficial or is it going to hinder me? The second question you need to ask (1 Corinthians 6:12), is it enslaving? Will it bring me into bondage? It may be that the Bible doesn't say 'thou shalt not drink wine' or 'thou shalt not drink alcohol' or 'thou shalt not smoke'. There's no verse or Scripture that says, 'thou shalt not chew tobacco' or 'thou shalt not smoke', so ask yourself, is it enslaving? I think the answer would have to be yes, so why would you want to be brought under bondage? For that matter, coffee, tea or other habits could become enslaving. I believe that as a Christian, you need to ask yourself, "If I get involved in this, will it bring me into bondage? Will I no longer be free?"

The third question is: Is it edifying (1 Corinthians 10:23)? "All things are lawful for me...but all things edify not," they do not build up. Have you ever watched a movie, and when it's over you

kind of say, "Wow, why did I do that? That was bad." My question is, why did you sit through the whole movie and have to say it at the end of the movie? Usually after the movie is over we're like, "Why didn't I walk out of the theater?" Don't raise your hand, but have you ever walked out of a theater? Have you ever been, "This is disgusting! I'm not going to watch this," and "I'm not going to listen to this," and "I'm not going to listen to the Lord's name taken in vain." You walk out of the theater. I've walked out of theaters where I've actually asked for my money back, "Can I have my money back? I'm not going to sit and watch that movie." We need to be careful about where we go, what we do, and ask ourselves, does it edify? Does it build up? This is a good question to ask with the music you listen to, the movies you watch, the people you hang around, the conversations you carry.

Fourthly, ask yourself, will it stumble others (Romans 14:21)? If I do this thing will it cause someone else to be stumbled? Fifthly, ask yourself, does it violate my conscience? If you can't do it with a clear conscience, if it bothers you and you think it's wrong, then it's wrong, and you shouldn't do that. "Yeah, but everyone else is doing it." So what. "Yeah, but the Bible doesn't really say it's wrong..." but it's convicting and bothering you then back away from that if it's bothering you and violates your conscience.

Last but not least, number six (here's our subject tonight), is it Christ-like? Would Jesus do it? Is it Christ-like? The activity, the music, the movie, the conversation, the clothes you wear, the things you're doing, ask yourself—is it like Jesus Christ who is always our example? Paul begins by speaking to the strong, and he identifies himself as being in their camp, verses 1-2, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak," the weaknesses, the problems that they have, we should bear the weak, "and not to please ourselves." I love that. "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification." What a world we would live in if everyone put this into practice. What a church we would have if everyone put this kind of principle into practice. What is it that Paul wants the strong to do? Their responsibility toward the weak? Well, first he wants the strong to bear with the faults and weaknesses of the weak, verse 1. Notice it says we should bear them, not crush them, not despise them, not stumble them, not put them down, not judge them, not even tolerate them, but rather carry them and support them.

I shared the example of a parent with the child. When you're a parent you don't get to do the things you used to do. You don't have the freedoms you used to have, and you have to kind of slow down. Try taking a walk with your three-year-old, and they want to smell the flowers, pick up the rocks, and pet the dogs. You just have to slow down for them and be patient with them when they're learning to walk, so we as believers, with other believers that are weaker and growing, don't kick them out of the family. We don't disregard or put them down. We're patient with them, and we give up our freedoms so that we can help and support them. Remember in Romans 13:8, we have a debt of love that we owe to others, so the principle is the strong are to help the weak. One person's strength can compensate for another person's weakness.

Secondly, also in verse 1, notice that the strong are not to please themselves. I love that. We're not to please ourselves. We are not to be self-centered or self-seeking. This is the

antithesis of what the world is saying right now. A lot of marriages end in divorce for this very reason. This is the worldly philosophy—do what you want to do. Make yourself happy. Fulfill your dreams. If it isn't good for you, give up and do what you want to do. Find yourself. Go after what you want, and if it's hampering to and hindering you—you've got to be free. I understand that if you feel like you're kind of in a restrictive relationship, that's very difficult, but that's not license for you to just bail out on your marriage. You say, "Well, Pastor John, that's easy for you to say, you know, your marriage is perfect." Oh ho ho, yes!

My wife and I just celebrated 39 years of marriage. She's going to be mad at me because I said that—she didn't want me to tell anybody. She doesn't like to be a spectacle, but you know what? It's the grace of God. It's God's grace because I am a wretched sinner! People come up to my wife and say, "It must be so amazing living with Pastor John!" She's like, "Oh yes! It is amazing alright." I mean it's amazing that she's put up with me for 39 years, and if by the grace of God that we survived that many years! It would've never happened if it wasn't for God, for the fear of the Lord and for God helping us to be humble and to repent and to ask for forgiveness and to keep going, and to want to honor God not living to please yourself. "I gotta be me," and "I gotta find myself," and "I just need to be free," instead of just dying to yourself and living to please others. How apropos this is in a marriage relationship. We should not be self-centered and self-seeking.

This is against our nature. Our sinful, Adamic nature is bent toward selfishness. Our Adamic nature is narcissistic. It's self absorbed. Whenever you're in a group picture and you see a print of it, who's the first person you look for? "Where am I? Oh, I don't look good." You know you think you do, you just want others to say, "No, that's a great picture of you!" "Oh, it is? Ho ho ho...thank you!" Or, when you're walking in the mall and you go by a window reflection in the store, you're not window shopping you're checking yourself out, "Whoa, I'm looking good." You're checking yourself out! We're so self absorbed. It's contrary to our nature.

I want to point out a third thing in verse 2—we should seek to please our neighbor. Isn't that amazing? We shouldn't live to please ourselves; we should live to please our neighbor. You say, "But, John, I thought we are not to be men pleasers." Yes, that's true. Neighbor pleasing, which the Scripture commends, must not be confused with man pleasing, which the Scripture condemns. What's the difference? Well, man pleasing is for your good. You are trying to please men to gain their favor and acceptance. So many people do this. They play the game, they dress a certain way, they talk the language, they want to go with the flow because they want people to think they're cool, liked, accepted, and they're part of the "in" crowd.

This was the big thing, of course, in my life before I got saved. I got saved right out of high school, so I'm speaking my "BC" days are all high school, but I remember in high school you gotta be seen in the right place on campus with the right people—the cool people. You would never hang over in the geek section, that's for sure. You don't want to be seen with these people or these people, and I realize this is all relative—what one group you think is cool, the other group you think is not cool, someone might have a different opinion than what you have, and that's what's so bizarre about this whole thing. Everybody has their idea that, "I want to be

accepted by this crowd, and I want to dress like them, talk like them, look like them, be invited to their parties.” You’re living to please others. At a very young age (I was 19), I actually said, “Why am I letting my friends influence me to go to hell? Literally. Why should I follow my friends? Why should I want to be hanging with my friends when they’re on their way to hell? They’re literally going to hell! Why should I do that?” I’ll never forget that when I became a Christian, I ran into a Kenneth Wuest quote that said, “I would rather walk a lonely road with Jesus than be without Him in the crowd.” I never forgot that. If none of my friends came with me, and none of my friends follow Jesus Christ, and they all thought I was totally a dork for becoming a Christian—I don’t care. I’m on my way to heaven. I’m following Jesus Christ. Amen?

We were singing that song, “If none go with me, I still will follow,” and so you die to yourself, take up your cross, and you follow Jesus Christ. You don’t care what people think or the world says, but that’s not what Paul is encouraging here. Paul is talking about pleasing your neighbor for their sake, for their good, and for God’s glory. Neighbor pleasing, verse 2, is for his good. It’s to build him up. It’s adjusting your lifestyle for the spiritual good of others. It’s the principle that we live not a self-pleasing, self-absorbed life but rather a neighbor-pleasing life for their good, for their edification, and to build up others. This may be super counterculture and super unpopular, but I believe it’s as hard-core Biblical and Christ-centered as you can ever imagine. If you are a Christian and a follower of Jesus Christ, you die to your goals, your plans, your wishes and your ambitions; you take up your cross, follow Jesus Christ, and live for His glory and for the good of others. That’s what a Christian does. That’s contrary to even some teaching in the church today. Even in the church today we hear this positive message about, “Since God loves you, He wants you to be happy and fulfilled,” and all that stuff. The way to happiness is to die to yourself and to live for others.

The acrostic for joy is: Jesus others you—always in that order. You want joy? Jesus comes first, others second, and you come last. That spells “joy,” and those people that are trying to find their life, Jesus said if you try to find your life what’s going to happen? You lose it, but if you lose your life for My sake and the gospel? What does He say? He says you’re going to find it. So many people are trying to find life and they’re losing it; when, in reality, if they’d lose their life for Christ they would actually find what life is all about. This is the principle that we live not for self but for others. Your life can be a blessing to others and build up others. Ask yourself, “Is there anything in my life and my lifestyle that ought to be changed for the good of others?”

I want you to note why should we please our neighbor and not ourselves? Why should we seek to follow Jesus Christ? These are the main four points that I want to share with you. I promise you, I’ll try not to tarry long on them, but for the rest of this text I’m going to be drawing these points from this passage. These are four reasons why we should follow Christ’s example and please our neighbor and not live for ourselves. Reason 1: Christ did not please Himself. Jesus Christ did not please Himself, verses 3-4. Go back with me to the text. It says, “For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written,” all through these verses, all the way down into verse 13, he’s going to be quoting from the Old Testament. Paul is giving us Scriptural reasons why we should live to follow Christ’s example, not please ourselves, and be a blessing to others.

He's quoting from Psalm 69:9, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me." Those words were spoken by King David, but they were prophetic. David says they were reproaching God but they fell on me, so Jesus is actually saying now that the reproaches of people fell on Me. Jesus came not to please Himself. In verse 4 he says, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," talking about the Old Testament Scriptures, "that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."

Paul, as he so often does, gives a theological Scriptural foundation. This simple statement sums up the meaning of the incarnation and the character of Christ's earthly life. Think about that in light of Christmas. Why did Jesus come from heaven down to earth? I tell you one thing—He didn't come down here to please Himself. Do you think He wanted to come down and be despised, rejected, spit upon, crucified, and bear the sins of the world? No. He didn't come down here to please Himself. He came down here to rescue you and me. It was a rescue mission.

Thomas Merton said these words: "To consider persons and events and situations only in the light of their effect upon myself is to live on the doorstep of hell." That's a powerful statement. Yet, so many people do that. Everything they think about is, "How's that going to effect me?" and "Is that good for me?" rather than, "Is that good for others? Is it going to bless others? Is it going to glorify God?" They're thinking only of themselves.

In verse 4, because of Psalm 69, Paul makes this statement about the Old Testament Scriptures—they were written for our learning. That's their contemporary intention. Maybe the Old Testament wasn't written to us, but it was written for our learning. It is also inclusive in value in everything that is written. Thirdly, it's practical in purpose. It brings comfort and hope through the Word of God. One of the ways that we can build other people up is by using God's Word, and next we're going to see (verse 4) is by praying for others—Jesus did not please Himself.

Let me give you the second reason we should live for our neighbor and seek to please them—because Christ is the way to united worship. We want to follow Jesus' example because when we focus on and worship Jesus and get our eyes on Jesus Christ, do you know what that does? It unites us. Follow with me in verses 5-6. He says, "Now the God of patience and consolation," what Paul is doing here is kind of a prayer and a wish for the believers. He is going to move into a section where he's talking about the Jews and the Gentiles getting along. It could be that the Jews were more the weaker brethren and legalistic, and the Gentiles were more the liberated believers and a little more the libertines or free in Christ, and he speaks to the two groups. He wants them to get along so he says, "Now the God of patience and consolation," I love those titles for God (patience and consolation), "grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus," so may God work in your hearts and help you to be likeminded to learn to get along with one another, "That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this verse, which is kind of a benediction and a prayer wish for the believers, he wants them to have unity (speaking to Jew and Gentile), and he also wants them to have a unified worship. When we are focused on Jesus with one mind and one heart it brings unity.

You've heard the illustration before, if we had a bunch of pianos on the stage and we tuned the first piano with a tuning fork and threw the tuning fork away, went to the second piano and tried to tune that to the first piano, and the third piano to the next, and we tried to tune them to one another, by the time you get down to four or five pianos they wouldn't all be in tune. But, if you take the one tuning fork and go to each piano individually, tuning it to the one tuning fork, what do you have? You have a bunch of pianos that all are in perfect tune with each other. Guess what that tuning fork represents? Jesus Christ. Do you know how we're going to get along? Do you know how we get along as Christians? By being "in tune" with Jesus Christ. By the way, that's how you get along in your marriage too—when you as a husband and wife are "in tune" with Jesus. When you're trying to be in tune with the world, you're going to be out of tune with God and you're not going to be in tune with your spouse. When you're both in tune to Jesus Christ then there is harmony in your home. I thought that was pretty cool. That wasn't in my notes. It just kind of came out. So get tuned up tonight. Before you leave, bow your heart and say, "Lord, just bring me into alignment with Your purpose and will. Help me to have Your peace, and help me to bring that into my marriage. Help me to bring that into my church."

Notice the mention to one mouth here. I can't resist doing this. Did you know that in Romans there are a lot of references to your mouth? And, if you look at each reference to the mouth in Romans, it actually gives a biographical sketch of the believer going from the sinner to the saved individual worshipping God. Turn back to Romans 3:14. You're going to love this. The first reference to the mouth in the book of Romans says, "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." Is that not a description of our "BC" days? Before Christ? Now jump down to Romans 3:19, the second reference to their mouth, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every," here it is, "mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." It starts off cursing then stops because it comes under conviction—the law brings that guilt and we're condemned. Now turn to Romans 10:9. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Our mouths are cursing, our mouths are closed, and now our mouths are confessing and we're saved. Then, we find ourselves in Romans 15:6, "That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It starts with cursing, and it ends with praising the Lord.

Tonight some of you were singing and praising God. That's the same mouth that sometime later was cursing. I won't ask for a show of hands, but you know who you were. God is able to change that heart from cursing to praising God. Amen? First your mouth is stopped, then you confess and you're saved, and now your heart is open and you're worshipping Jesus. What an awesome thing that is! R. Kent Hughes said, "It is no small thing to be asked to forgo legitimate rights for the building up of brothers and sisters. This is demanding, but perfectly reasonable and possible, first, because Christ did it, and, second because it is indispensable to true worship." When we gather here to worship God, or you're worshipping in your home or with other Christians, you have to die to yourself and worship Jesus Christ. What that does is brings us together in unity and harmony.

Let me give you the third reason that we should follow Christ's pattern—not please ourselves

but please our neighbor. It's because Christ accepted you, verse 7. Because God has forgiven you and Christ has accepted you, you ought to also accept your brother and your sister. Notice verse 7, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." I mean, that says it just plain and simple and black and white. Even as Jesus received you, so you should receive them. You know, if God has received you, who are you not to receive somebody else?

I meet Christians who say, "I can't forgive them. I don't want to see them anymore. I don't want to have anything to do with them anymore. I don't like them anymore." They build these walls. Do you know the Bible says to be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you? It also says that if you don't forgive others, you can't expect God to forgive you. It's an indication you're not really forgiven. We need to learn to be forgiving at the foot of the cross because God has forgiven us, and when God has forgiven us such a massive debt, how can we not in turn be forgiving those who have sinned against us? I believe that he is talking here to the Jews and Gentiles. He's telling them that they need to receive one another as Christ received you to the glory of God.

Here's the true basis of being received in the church. It's not your denominational affiliation, it's not your spiritual maturity, it's not your social status, and it's not your race. It's the fact that Christ has received you. Do you know when we have service, we don't stand in the foyer and ask, "Do you have a PhD? You can't come in here without a PhD. We don't ask if they live in the good part of town. We don't ask what denomination they are. We don't ask what race they are. We don't do that. Christ has received us. In Christ there is neither male nor female, bond or free, Greek or Scythian (which is barbarian), but we are all one in Jesus Christ. This doesn't mean that we take down the walls and have no standards for what God's Word says is the standard for holiness or fellowship or doctrinal truth, but it does mean that in the body of Christ there are no walls or barriers. We all worship equally at the foot of the cross, and God loves and accepts us all. If there is any place in the world that we can be accepted it should be in the church of Jesus Christ to the glory of God.

Here's the last point, verses 8-13, because Christ became a servant. Why should I love and serve others, live for others, and seek to please my neighbor and not myself? Because Christ came and that's what He did. From here on he clearly talks about Jesus came into the world to reconcile two groups that were as divided as any groups have ever been divided in the history of mankind—the Jew and the Gentile—and how through the blood of the cross they have both become one. Follow with me in verse 8. He says, "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision..." a reference to the Jews, "...for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers," he's explaining why Jesus came, for the Jewish people to show the faithfulness that God keeps His promises. Then he speaks of the Gentiles in verse 9, "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy." Jesus came for the Jew (verse 8) and for the Gentile (verse 9) that they might glorify God for his mercy, "...as it is written," if you want to write these down, I'm going to give the references from the Old Testament. He's quoting from Psalm 18:49. "For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." He is pointing out that in the Old Testament God actually prophesied that the Gentiles would come to



know the Lord. Verse 10, "And again he saith," now he's quoting from Psalm 117:1, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. 11 And again," quoting from Isaiah 11:10, "Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. 12 And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. 13 Now the God of hope..." this is his closing of this whole section on Christian liberty when Christians disagree, "...fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

This series of quotes from the Old Testament are all given for one reason and one reason only. Do you know what that is? To show that when Jesus Christ left heaven and came down to earth and wasn't here to please Himself, He actually reconciled two hostile groups together—Jew and Gentile. They became one. The Gentiles will praise and worship Him, and the Jews would realize that He came to fulfill the promises made to their fathers. Jesus came to show the Jews the fidelity of God through His promises and to show the Gentiles the wonders of God's grace and mercies. Two groups could not be more opposed but in Christ they became one. There is unity.

Technically, today in Christianity, I don't believe that we have the Jewish believer and the Gentile believer—we are all just believers. We're all one in Jesus Christ. Now, I know the Jews like to think of themselves as completed Jews and so forth, or messianic Jews. That's fine, but they're Christians just like a Gentile, and God doesn't love the Jew any more than the Gentile. "For God so loved the world," it doesn't say God so loved the Jews, that he gave his only begotten Son, and to the Gentiles, well, He just created them to fuel the fires of hell. That's what the Jews believed, by the way.

You think there is racial prejudice and racism in the world today? In America today? It's nothing compared to that which is between the Jew and the Gentile. The Jew actually believed...do you know when they would get up in the morning the first thing they would pray, "God, I thank you I'm not a Gentile." That's the first prayer. The second thing they would say, "I thank you that I'm not a woman." In Christ there is neither male nor female. "I thank you that I'm not a Gentile. I thank you that I'm not a woman." There was no greater divide than that between the Jew and the Gentile. The Jews actually believed the Gentiles were only created by God for fueling the fires of hell and you couldn't get to heaven if you wanted to. Yet, their Old Testament spoke about it. It spoke all the way through about it, and even Jesus who came to be a light to the Gentiles, and even in the gospels as He went to the woman of Samaria, He went to the outcasts, and He went to people who were nonJewish. It really upset the Jewish establishment, but the purpose that Paul is writing is to show us if Jesus could give Himself up, deny Himself for the sake of others, then we can do the same.

Christians ought not to be arguing, fighting, and dividing over nonessentials. Let's not have a church split over what color the carpet is—it's not in the Bible. Let's not have a church split over what kind of music we play, or clothes we wear, or whether we baptize face forward or face backwards. Lighten up. I wish there was a verse that just said, "Christian, lighten up." Calm down. Don't be so picky. Phariseeism is not dead. There are a lot of Christian Pharisees.

Sometimes they drive weaker brothers and sisters away from the grace of God because of their legalism. Our hearts should also be big enough, like Christ, to bring reconciling groups together, to bring people who are at odds together.

In closing, this benediction is a marvelous benediction, and I do want to take the entire verse sometime and just preach a whole message on verse 13, but I think that you have a whole picture in this benediction of the Christian life who lives in fellowship with God—the God of hope. What a great title for God (verse 13). There's no hope apart from God, and without God we're hopeless. The Christian life is a full life—fill you. The Christian life is bright and beautiful—all joy and peace. The Christian life is a life of faith—in believing. The Christian life is a life of hope—overflow with hope. The Christian life is a life of power—through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, if I were to summarize three weeks of teaching with this one statement, this would be it: In essentials—unity; in nonessentials—liberty; in all things—charity or love. As far as the application of Christian liberty we need to have in essentials—unity; in nonessentials—liberty. Lighten up. Don't be judgmental, critical, or faultfinding, but in all things always show love. Always speak the truth in love. There is never any time when love is not en vogue. It's always in fashion. We need to speak the truth in love. Amen? Let's pray.