

Romans 15:1-6 (NKJV)

1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."

4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,

6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I started my study this week with a question running through the back of my mind. Why is Paul spending so much ink on this topic? Think about it. Paul has spent a chapter and a half telling the Romans that they need to put their insignificant differences behind them in the interest of love. I was thinking, Paul, we get this already. We get the point. It is time to move on.

But then it dawned on me that, no, we don't get it. In fact, the seed of this problem is in many of the difficulties we face.

I think this question gets to the heart of the matter. What do you have a right to? What do you have a right to?

The Romans who were correct in their theology thought that what they had the freedom to do, they had the right to do. And that subtle difference in their thinking led to great destruction. They confused rights and freedoms. And in doing so they did evil. They did harm.

So again, what do you have the right to?

The best way to discover what we really think about our rights is to listen to ourselves when we complain about our circumstances. You know, we might be 100% correct about other's wrong behaviors. We can be very accurate about what others **should** or **should not** do. But what is it about all that that really gets to us? What really gets under our skin? Isn't it the idea that I have a right to something better? Don't we have pictures in our minds of what we expect? What we have a right to? Isn't that where the fireworks often come from? Unfulfilled expectations?

What do you have a right to?

Men- What do you think you have a right to in your families? What do you expect from your wife and your kids? And when that expectation is not fulfilled, what happens? Isn't that the point where it all starts to spiral down? Where destruction begins?

Women- What do you expect from your husbands? Do you think you have the right to a person who does everything the way you want it done? Where does that idea come from? Does scripture promise that? Or is that a thought that comes from flesh? Do you have in mind a person who will fulfill your emotional needs as you experience them? And what happens when that right is not fulfilled? What happens then? Do you then have liberty to do whatever you want, even though scripture gives you very specific instructions as to how you should act and think?

Children- What rights have you imagined for yourselves? Do you have a right to perfectly rational and consistent parents? Is that something that you found in scripture somewhere? Do you think you have the right to always receiving uplifting and encouraging responses? Is that something you found in scripture somewhere. I have not found that yet.

And body members- What rights have we imagined? Do we have the right to always be treated with respect and love? Do we have the right to have our feelings considered in everything that is done? Do we have the right to be the center of other people's focus? The way we act sometimes it would appear that we do.

Now at first glance we might think these rights we hold in our minds, these expectations, are no big deal. They are just our quirks. **But they are not small at all.** They are the seeds of our discontentment. They are the openings we have created for the devil to do harm. They are the tinder in our minds where the devil can shoot his fiery darts. It is his opportunity to get us to do things that we said we would never do. It is his opportunity to get us to rescind our sacred vows. And the worst thing about it is, we feel we are justified. We are justified to do that which we have always regarded as being wrong. We are justified to exhibit behavior that scripture prohibits and to harbor thoughts that scripture warns against. A world of evil opens up when we **carry with us** an expectation of rights that do not find their source in scripture. That is what is happening in our Romans text. The strong in faith have rights and by living that way they do evil to their brothers. And they are blind to it because they have rights. Preach on Paul. We need what you are saying. Because we are people who love our rights.

Now, does this mean that we should not, or cannot, discern things that our brothers and sisters are doing wrong? Does this mean that we cannot address those things? Absolutely not. Scripture is full of instruction for how we should carry out that ministry.

But the biggest problem I have seen is that we want to start at the wrong place. Mike used to always say you need to read your own mail. Don't start by reading someone else's. Start by reading your own.

I like my wife's mail. Because when I read my wife's mail I know that her doing what it says will make my life more pleasant. I can really get behind those scriptures. It is easy for me to like those scriptures. But I can't be sure of my motives.

I like where it says:

Colossians 3:18 (NKJV)

18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

1 Peter 3:3-4 (NKJV)

3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel--

4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

Yeah, that is good mail. Yeah, Carla, you should get really good at that.

But now.... my mail, that is a little more difficult to get excited about. Because it means dying to myself. It means giving up my rights. It means spiritual work and battle.

My mail says things like this:

1 Timothy 2:8 (NKJV)

8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;

Titus 2:2 (NKJV)

2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience;

Colossians 3:19 (NKJV)

19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.

Colossians 3:21 (NKJV)

21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Ephesians 6:4 (NKJV)

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Ephesians 5:24-28 (NKJV)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

1 Peter 3:7 (NKJV)

7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

1 Corinthians 7:3 (NKJV)

3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her

Those verses are **my** mail. And that is where **my** primary focus needs to be. Our wives may or may not take their mail seriously. We cannot make her. It is not our job to make her. But it is our job to be godly men. And we have no excuse, no matter what she might choose to do. I just use that as an example of how we should think.

God has given us all enough to do. He has given us lots of mail. If we love each other, we will point to the mail that was given to each of us for our benefit. Behavior problems in believers are addressable. But it is not our God-given right that the other person will obey God the way they should. That is where we make the mistake. It **is**, however, our God-given right to have everything we need to be faithful and obedient, no matter what our surroundings.

Now let's look at how Paul deals with his own personal freedoms and even things he says are rights.

1 Corinthians 10:30-33 (NKJV)

30 But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks?

31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

32 Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Here is the attitude lived out that Paul is preaching in Romans. He puts his money where his mouth is. He tells us how he sees things. His primary focus is not on the technicality of his freedoms. He is not using that reasoning to create for himself a set of rights that he can demand or expect. No. What does Paul compute?

He says- **31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**

When we ask, is this my right that I can demand, we are normally asking the wrong question. What is the right question? What can I do in this situation that will give God maximum glory? What is the thing that will most aid His kingdom? What can I do that will most please Him?

I can tell you one thing. That response will never ever come from flesh. That only comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in a person. Look at the decisions you are making. Are you thinking like the Romans or like Paul? Are you more concerned with what is **in it for you** or what is **in it for God**? That is where we make our biggest mistakes. We put the wrong person on the throne. We listen to the wrong voices. We want what **We** want at the price of what God wants.

So first Paul decides whose glory he is going to serve.

Then he chooses whose profit he is going to serve. When you seek first to give God glory, you will always work for the profit of His people, whether they are already saved or yet to be saved. Paul knew this. So he says **just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.**

How many calamities have we gotten into by choosing that which is for another's profit? Most of the times we can trace our failures down to our own selfishness. We were living for our own profit. Yet that is not what Paul is telling us to do. He tells us that he seeks the profit of many over his own temporary benefit. Suppose we were to do that in our difficult circumstances? What would God do through us?

Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:12 (NKJV) says

12 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

Here again Paul talks about his freedoms. And we see another principle. There are some things that are technically lawful, but they will do us harm. Maybe someone else can enjoy them as they are made to be enjoyed, but we can't. We are created for a higher purpose. We are created to please God. We cannot reduce our existence to a technical moral list of freedoms and prohibitions. There are more things to be considered than that. Will this freedom master us? Will this freedom do us harm? So the issue is not only how this freedom will affect others. We also must weigh what this freedom will do to our spiritual walk.

Then

Colossians 3:17 (NKJV)

17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

We looked at this before when we discussed the litmus test of thanks. Remember how we talked about how we should be able to be thanking God in everything that we do. And if we feel we must enjoy something in seclusion from God, that is a good indication that we shouldn't do that thing at all.

Well Paul also gives us some helpful information before the phrase about thanks. He is telling us **the basis for every decision**, the thought process for all that we do, the rubric for our next step. It doesn't matter if it is something we are going **to say** or something we are going **to do**. Everything has to fit this framework. And what is the framework? Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Now remember we looked at what in the name of Jesus really means. It means in His will. It means the thing that serves His interest, the thing that honors His name. This is way more than questioning- "Is this thing technically forbidden or permissible?" No. It goes beyond that sphere. It is asking, is this the thing that Jesus wants me to say or do? How is it going to benefit His kingdom? Are we getting the point? This is way beyond this idea of rights.

Galatians 5:6 (NKJV)

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

I like the way the NIV translates this. It says **the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love**. Do you see it again? He could have said the only thing that matters is – **is this thing technically allowed or forbidden**. But he does not say that. Paul takes it right back to the kingdom level. What **does** matter?

What matters is that we are acting in our trust in the character of God and doing those things that are to the profit of others.

Do you see how that flies in the face of most of our selfish thinking? How many arguments have been spurred on by **this kind** of thinking and living? How many bad decisions have come about in our lives from **this kind** of faithfulness? Oh we might make **judgment** mistakes when trying to carry out this sort of a life. But they are **far better mistakes** than we would make living for self.

It is interesting to me that we are told here that the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love. We are told in Romans that whatever is not of faith is sin. That seems like a pretty hard line. But that is how important **walking by faith** is. That is how important it is to live according to the Holy Spirit and to walk according to our faith, according to our relationship with Christ. It is more a **personal** thing than a **technical** thing. It is more about **who** we are living for than **what** we are living for.

Now let's look at one more passage by Paul. This passage is particularly telling because he is talking about rights. Now these were things that Paul **did** have a right to. These are things he **could have demanded** and he had a right to receive them. They are issues that are more legitimate than many of the things we expect.

1 Corinthians 9:1-23 (NKJV)

1 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 My defense to those who examine me is this:

4 Do we have no right to eat and drink?

5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?

Do you see what he is saying? I am a minister that has rights, just like the other ministers. I have a right to make a living by the work that I am doing among you. I have a right to ask for and receive money from you to meet my expenses. So these are things he could demand. He had every right to demand them. Then he goes on to talk about the reasoning behind it all.

7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?

8 Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also?

9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about?

10 Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.

11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?

12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more?

Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.

So Paul lays out the rock solid basis of this right. He shows his superior theology. He shows he has every right to this privilege. But what does he **do**? He does the thing that will **least hinder** the Gospel. He does the thing that creates **the least obstacles** for those he is ministering to. He shows a faith expressing itself in love. He does what he does for the Glory of Christ and it is done for the profit of those he serves. He does exactly what he tells us to do.

Have you ever considered that he could have had a knock down drag out fight with these people? He could have demanded his rights and then you know how that goes. Some would respond in flesh and say No Paul, you aren't a big shot like Peter. You weren't one of the original 12. Who do you think you are anyway? It would have escalated into so many of the fights and arguments that all of us have experienced. Just people fighting for their rights.

But Paul would have none of that. He laid aside his rights for the benefit of the Kingdom of God. He wanted no obstacles for the gospel. He wanted the greatest chance of people hearing his message.

Paul goes on a few verses later:

15 But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.

Paul is telling them, I am not saying this so now you will treat me better and give me my rights. He is sticking to his principles. He will have nothing come between his listeners and the gospel. He can't even be tempted to succumb to that right. Wow. Now that is conviction.

16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.

18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;

20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law;

21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;

22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

Here is a man who has given up all his rights for the sake of something higher, something better, something more important. Here is a man who truly lives for God and he will not allow flesh to have a foothold. He will not allow anything, permissible or forbidden, to distract him from his purpose in this world. Here is an example to be followed.

What rights do you have? What rights are you claiming that are proving to be a distraction to you and others to the kingdom of God? What **freedoms** are more important to you than the benefit of your brothers and sisters? What freedoms are you **fighting for** where the fighting is just causing harm and division and destruction.

Maybe this is the week to do business with that attitude. Maybe this is the week to die to ourselves in that area and give up those selfish ideas. Maybe this is the week to realize that I was not put in my exact circumstances for my pleasure. I was put here for **Christ's pleasure**, for His will, for His service. And instead of balking against my circumstances, maybe I should start thinking like Paul. I need to start asking, what action or response would give God the most glory? What response would give others the most profit? What can I do in this circumstance that would most represent the name of Jesus?

Maybe this is the week that God will start a ball rolling in our lives that will take us places that we have always wanted to go, but wondered why we couldn't get there.

I believe when Jesus said the following, he was talking about this kind of life.

Matthew 16:24-27 (NKJV)

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

Let's do business with this, this week and God may use this time to begin to turn around some things in your life that you did not think could ever be turned around.