

Romans 20 - He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother

Our Walk in the Church (Part 2)

Last week, we looked at the limitations of how we judge each other in our church relationships. In chapter 14, we were looking at being charitable, the alternative to *hastily* judging others. Where we should not be so quick to judge each other according to chapter 14, we *ought* to be quick to support each other according to chapter 15. These two passages are best studied together, but because of time constraints in a meeting it is good to split them up to do justice to the issues. Chapter 14 tells you what *not* to do, chapter 15 then tells you what you *should* do *instead* when you encounter someone or something that is not quite right in church. Chapter 15:1-7 deals with what you are supposed to do when you see something that could stand to be corrected.

1. Be a strong person -

There was a popular ballad in the 70s titled, *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother*. Part of the song expressed the theme:

The road is long
With many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where,
But I'm strong
Strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy, he's my brother

The title and point of the song comes from *The Parables of Jesus*, an 1884 book by a Scottish pastor who wrote about a little girl carrying a big baby boy. Watching her struggle, someone asked if she wasn't tired. With surprise she replied, "No, he's not heavy; he's my brother."¹ Romans 15:1 should motivate us to remember that the reason we hang in there when difficulties arise in our relationships, specifically at church, is because we are dealing with our *brothers*. We have to be ready to carry the load.

Rom 15:1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Gal 6:9-10 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

To *bear the infirmities of the weak* in Rom 15:1 does not refer to helping people *physically* in their sickness. The weakness here is a reference to what was covered in the previous chapter. Weakness refers to someone who is probably more worried than they need to be about how strict

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He_Ain't_Heavy,_He's_My_Brother

things are in church. Their tolerance level for doing anything different from the norm is very low. Someone who is strong is not so reactive. They can endure differences longer as they work with someone to bring them around.

This reminds me of times when I have been out with Nancy and there is someone nearby who thinks that his filthy mouth is his way to show off his masculinity. It is actually encouraging to know that people will many times respond positively if you ask them nicely to remember that there are ladies present. There are other times when people will have enough good manners and apologize for cursing in front of a preacher. Many times I will try to be a blessing and "help" by offering a word that I am sure they really meant to use. It is not just a case of being vulgar. There is a spiritual effect. There is a reason why it is called *cursing* and not *blessing*. When you examine James 3 you begin to realize that it is not such a small issue.

A person who is weaker might gasp and cry out how their ears are bleeding. Sometimes people respond positively, but there are also times when people *don't care* about how they sound. They pile it on so they can watch the little Christian break down. Nancy has had people curse all the more in the workplace when they have found out that she was a Christian. She is strong and longsuffering for the Gospel and was quite capable of kindly and firmly dealing with them. Whether we speak up for decorum's sake or hold our peace so that we can focus on the Gospel, we don't have to melt because sinners behave like sinners.

Being strong to the point of enduring even abuse is the proper understanding of this verse. While weakness is something to work with, it can turn into something else.

2. Don't be a petty person -

When it comes to our relationships in church, each one is in either the stronger position or the weaker position in a relationship. As reasonable as it sounds to be a stronger Christian, one of the most common problems in churches comes from people who are not. The problem is when the weaker brother turns into the *petty* brother.

Human interaction inherently involves friction between people. Most friction between people is just taken in stride. For example, when you're playing some sport and people jokingly tease each other. Everyone has a few laughs. We're all going to fumble our words and come off as insensitive at some point, but being strong and loyal to each other we should always be able to count on each other to pray with as much faith as we can muster. However, when people are offended because of common communication issues or the way they would prefer to see things done in church, they can easily move from being a weaker brother to being a petty, overly-sensitive person. The problem is not limited to interactions with people. It could be a program, or a method, or a decision that upsets someone. People are usually blind to the pettiness, but on top of that, they feel very righteous. They might prefer to describe themselves as very confident in how important their issue is. They dig their heels in, ready to fight the good fight to make their case which they often do as they are walking out the door.

This problem stems from an ill informed sense of right and wrong. There are two basic sources for morality: God or self.

Satan disguises submission to himself under the ruse of personal autonomy. He never asks us to become his servants. Never once did the serpent say to Eve, "I want to be your master." The shift in commitment is never from Christ to evil; it is always from Christ to self. And

instead of his will, self-interest now rules and what *I* want reigns. And that is the essence of sin.

– Dennis F. Kinlaw

True morality, goodness, and righteousness is grounded in some standard. God, in His infinitely and holy righteousness is the ultimate ground of morality.

Ps 119:137-142 Righteous *art* thou, O LORD, and upright *are* thy judgments.

138 Thy testimonies *that* thou hast commanded *are* righteous and very faithful.

...

142 Thy righteousness *is* an everlasting righteousness, and thy law *is* the truth.

Deut 32:4 *He is* the Rock, his work *is* perfect: for all his ways *are* judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right *is* he.

Ps 19:7-9 The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple.

8 The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether.

If morality is not grounded in God, then it is relative and subjective to what is convenient to man. Subjective morality is meaningless.

In a basic philosophy class the atheistic professor taught that when people say that something is right or wrong what they are really only saying is "I like this or I don't like that." He was absolutely right with respect to a morality not grounded in God. He was right that this is the standard people generally use. This is the mistake that church people make when they are being petty. Sometimes they even might try to find a Scripture that seems to apply, but often they just cry that there was some failure of social etiquette. They will go so far as to claim they are defending God's honor and standing for righteousness. "You offended me and this should not be tolerated. And you claim to be a Christian!" "That decision was poor stewardship. You're wasting God's resources." "We should spend more time on evangelism." "Why aren't we having more fellowship?" "We need more discipleship." Of course, they are only concerned about God's righteous standards when it is convenient. They are not so concerned when it comes to tithing, attending church and hungering and thirsting for God's Word at Bible studies, or pitching in and doing their part. They are also not so concerned about being the strong one. They are presenting themselves as the weak brother when what they really are is the petty brother.

If you ever feel slighted and want to walk away from church or a relationship in church, that is the time to consider that God is calling *you* to be the strong one, exercise endurance, and *work* on the problem. Consider Romans 15:1 in this light.

Rom 15:1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

To keep from turning into the petty person who is focused on pleasing himself, the weak brother should look at difficult moments as a time to minister to others.

3. When the going gets tough, the tough get going -

Romans 15 continues on with the challenge to being a strong servant of God in the church.

Rom 15:2-7 Let every one of us please *his* neighbour for *his* good to edification.

3For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

4For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

5Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

6That ye may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

Our focus should be on pleasing our neighbor, not ourselves. This Scripture is about how the strong help the weak move from weaker to stronger to avoid moving to petty. We please them *for their good, for their edification*. This guards against turning our brother into a petty minded Christian. In seeking his edification, it is to *build him up* in the Lord, not confirm him in his weakness. Our purpose is to populate and educate, not isolate and insulate. We are to populate the kingdom of God by going forth and reaching the world with the Gospel. Then we are to educate, or build disciples. Churches struggle because weak brothers who got offended isolate themselves and further insulate themselves from any admonition or challenge.

The great example Paul gives is Christ. Aren't you glad that Christ didn't run back home when they wanted to stone Him, malign Him, betray Him, and ultimately crucify Him?

Paul next points to the saints of the Old Testament and what they endured so that we could have their example.

God wants us to be like-minded, or have all of us committed to being strong believers who can endure the frictions and frailties of our finite selves so that we can all bring glory to God.

Finally, Paul points out that that is what Jesus did for us. Is our righteousness greater than Christ's that we can judge him who He has forgiven?

Paul wrote something similar to the Galatians:

Gal 6:1-2 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Those who are spiritual are supposed to restore the weaker brother. Many people rule themselves out of being the strong one. They see that it says *ye which are spiritual*. They think they are not spiritually qualified to deal with an issue. Such a burden is too heavy for them. Dealing with people is for the spiritual leaders.

First of all, if you are spiritual enough to recognize the problem, then you *are* a spiritual one. If you notice a problem in church, you are qualified to help become part of the solution, not just a petty critic. Secondly, remember that person you are avoiding isn't heavy. He's your brother.

When the going gets tough, the tough get going. You can be the strong one who builds up his brother instead of giving in to pettiness because he isn't heavy. He's your brother. You can be strong one who doesn't leave the church work to someone else because it isn't heavy. You're carrying your brother. You can be the strong one who seeks to establish reconciliation because he isn't heavy. He's your brother.

We will deal soon with the harsh reality that sometimes you get to the point where you just have to let someone go, but it should not be without a fight for their soul.

The challenge today for someone who has not committed themselves to Christ as their Savior is to realize that Christ has always been there fighting for your soul. You might have let all kinds of things get in the way of turning to Christ. You might be weak in faith, but don't reject Him out of pettiness. Jesus is strong *for* you. When He went to the cross, it wasn't too heavy for Him to bear. He did it to give you the opportunity to be His brother. If you are not saved, won't you turn to Him today?

If you *are* saved, then would you accept the spiritual challenge to help carry the load? When you consider that the burden you carry is for your brother, it won't be so heavy. Whether it be here at church, at home in the family, in our neighborhood or at work, when things get tough are you willing to get going for God or are you looking for a way to escape and get going *from* God? Dealing with someone might be work, but it is such a blessed work. Are there temptations and sins that you are harboring that are keeping you from carrying your spiritual load? Then your challenge is to let them loose and pick up your cross and follow Christ.

1. Be a strong person - Rom 15:1, Gal 6:9-10
2. Don't be a petty person - Ps 119:137-142, Deut 32:4 , Ps 19:7-9, Rom 15:1
3. When the going gets tough, the tough get going - Rom 15:2-7, Gal 6:1-2