

Romans 22 - It's Personal

After Paul's exposition of the doctrinal relationship between the Law and Grace, the ending of the book of Romans moves in a totally different direction. We are used to greetings coming at the beginning of a letter in a salutation, but Paul places this at the end in chapter 16. After so much heavy thinking, it is nice to end on a more intimate note. His greetings are so extensive that we can see that ministry is not just academic and theological, it is also very tender and personal.

In times of difficulty, the personal aspect of ministry should help sustain a relationship. But too often, the personal aspect of ministry becomes a point of contention.

1. When ministry is not personal -

Before we delve into how ministry is about the blessing of close personal relationships, we should take note of a verse in the middle of chapter 16 that speaks of boundaries. Not every relationship will be fruitful because of our efforts. There comes a point where we might have to let someone go. We will look at the great personal relationships Paul mentions in the chapter, but before he gets too far we read:

Rom 16:17-20 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

18For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

19For your obedience is come abroad unto all *men*. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

20And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.

Sometimes no matter how hard you try, there are those who are just plain divisive if they are tolerated.

Prov 22:10 Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.

Prov 22:24 Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go:

This should require a pretty strong standard. Paul specifically mentions that you absolutely have to draw the line at doctrine. There are those who might not be good communicators or need to be more careful with their social skills. As we saw in the last chapter, we need to be supportive of them.

When it comes to dealing with division, we have to be impartial, knowing that we are dealing with God's standards.

Rom 2:11-13 For there is no respect of persons with God.

12For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have

sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

13(For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

1Tim 1:19-20 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:

20Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

We can't let personal relationships get in the way when we really do need to let someone go. This can occur when we get to a business meeting and actually have a serious problem. We can report the extreme lengths we have gone to be able to work with an errant brother, but there are those who by default think that anything that isn't positive is unloving. After much deliberation, giving someone the opportunity to recover *is* loving. Leaving someone in the bitterness of sin is *not* loving.

For as many people that we are going to see in Paul's life, there were those who had to be let go. This doesn't mean that there is *never* any hope for them, but sometime ministry can't get bogged down in the paralysis of analysis. This was the case of Mark.

Acts 15:36-40 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they do.

37And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

38But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

39And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

40And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

Later, after Mark had a chance to grow, Paul had a new estimation of him. When he was in prison, Paul wrote to Timothy:

2Tim 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

2. Personal problems -

The larger part of this chapter is the opposite of the problem of personal problems in the church. Church is personal. There is no such thing as a "church industry." Even though we have church *business* to take care of, the church is not a commercial enterprise. Personal problems take place when we treat people like they are just a cog in a machine. It is not limited to church, by the way. Sometimes people think of a cashier as if they are the upper management that impersonally imposes greedy rules on their customers. Or, they forget that their waiter is a person and not some servant who has to be taught a lesson and whipped into line.

When someone has a problem with you, they might try to claim that it is nothing personal. "I am

firing you, but it's nothing personal. Business is business." "I am ghosting you, but it's nothing personal...I'm just too busy." With social media, you just get dropped as a friend and if you are generous you are just supposed to think there is nothing personal behind it. Your relationship is just dropped without a hint as to why.

On the other hand, people think that if they say something is personal, you aren't allowed to ask questions. With people you are trying to witness to, they might claim that religion is a personal and not subject to discussion. Fellow-believers might use the consideration that something is personal and then hide behind that. "It's not you, it's me...but I'm not going to talk about it because it's personal." Translation, "I'm not going to give you a chance to make a difference." "I am leaving you and everyone behind, but I can't (actually won't) tell you why because it's too personal." More often, they just say "I am leaving but I won't tell you why." It makes it look important and mysterious. The bonds of love are so weak that they are not willing to make the effort to maintain the relationship. A more honest yet self contradicting statement would be "It's nothing personal, I just don't like you."

We saw back in Rom 12 how we are supposed to put others first.

Rom 12:9-10 *Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.*

10*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;*

3. Personal ministry -

As we minister to each other, we need to keep in the forefront that we are forging personal relationships, not just an institution.

John 13:34-35 *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

35*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

John 15:13-17 *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

14*Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

15*Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.*

...

17*These things I command you, that ye love one another.*

If it weren't for the greater doctrinal statement by calling ourselves a church and the fact that the name is already taken by the Quakers, I think an interesting name for church would be a Society of Friends.

The bulk of chapter 16 reveals important people in the life of Paul. They are more than acquaintances, but many were people who were involved in ministries that impacted Paul.

- Vs. 1-2 Phebe was so active in serving that Paul encouraged the Romans to support her in any

way possible.

- Vs. 3-4 Priscilla and Aquila were supportive as teachers who had blessed Apollo. They put their lives at risk for Paul and other churches
- Vs. 5 Paul had fond memories of Epaphroditus, his first convert in Greece
- Vs. 6 Mary had bestowed much labor on Paul
- Vs. 7,11 Andronicus and Junia were relatives of Paul. They were saved before him. There is something special about relatives who are saved. Vs. 11 mentions Herodion also.
- Vs. 13 Rufus was like a brother. His mother was like a mother to Paul
- Numerous others are mentioned and not forgotten. No one was so small to not be noticed.

Paul not only had greetings *for* people, but also *from* people. Paul appreciated his fellow laborers. Timothy, who was like a son to Paul, other relatives who ministered with him, Gaius, his host, and others were special to Paul. His success in ministry was as part of a team of friends. Even when it is not personal, there is still a personal component. All of these people were coworkers, but they were coworkers because they shared the same burden.

They had the bonding of friendship. However, the bonds of friendship are created with deliberation. When someone is not a friend, get personal and make them your friend.

Prov 18:24 A man *that hath* friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend *that sticketh* closer than a brother.

Bonds can only be formed by time. You cannot form bonds without spending time with someone. Apart from worshiping God, there are three main functions of a church. One is evangelism, another is discipleship, and the third is fellowship. If you elevate one above the others or neglect one, you will not have a fully functioning church. It is great that people appreciate the Bible knowledge that is taught. And we are acutely aware of the need for bringing people to the Lord. If we neglect creating the bonds of fellowship we are just as doomed as if we neglect the others. Evangelism brings people in, discipleship builds them up, but fellowship binds them together.

A great documented testimony of the work it takes for such friendship is from Rosaria Butterfield.

When I was 28 years old, I boldly declared myself lesbian. I was at the finish of a PhD in English Literature and Cultural Studies. I was a teaching associate in one of the first and strongest Women's Studies Departments in the nation. I was being recruited by universities to take on faculty and administrative roles in advancing radical leftist ideologies. I genuinely believed that I was helping to make the world a better place. At the age of 36, I was one of the few tenured women at a large research university, a rising administrator, and a community activist. I had become one of the "tenured radicals." By all standards, I had made it. That same year, Christ claimed me for himself and the life that I had known and loved came to a humiliating end...

My Christian life unfolded as I was just living my life, my normal life. In the normal course of life questions emerged that exceeded my secular feminist worldview. Those questions sat quietly in the crevices of my mind until I met a most unlikely friend: a Christian pastor. Had a pastor named Ken Smith not shared the gospel with me for years

and years, over and over again, not in some used-car-salesman way, but in an organic, spontaneous and compassionate way, those questions might still be lodged in the crevices of my mind and I might never have met the most unlikely of friends, Jesus Christ himself.¹

Over the course of three years, Pastor Ken Smith and his wife, Floy, were friends to Rosaria. They talked *with* her, sought to understand her and be understood, prayed for her, and encouraged her. They did not hide their views. They did not support her sin. They did the work of faithfully paying attention with true love and concern. She ate with them. She visited them and observed their lives. She felt her true concern for her. Today, Rosaria and her husband, who is a pastor, have three children and serve God in North Carolina.

One of the things that contributes to our reluctance to reach out is the threat of rejection. It might be very small or large. We might not be aware of our own sense of rejection if it is very small. I assure you that your fear of being worthy enough is much more noticeable if you are about to ask someone to marry you! As you can see, she ultimately said "Yes." In our day to day relationships, that person you are reluctant to approach is your ministry challenge.

Friendships are also often forged in adversity. Sometimes friends can be offensive, but you shouldn't forget the personal history, years of good times, and loyalty.

Prov 17:17 A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Being born for adversity means that we apply the principle of love, wanting the best for others, no matter how hard it is. A small boy defined a friend as "Someone who knows all about you and likes you just the same." Being offended doesn't mean you are right. Being offended should not be a license to expect people to cater to you. Because we have a method for dealing with problems in Matt 18, one thing we should never allow ourselves to do is to just walk away.

Prov 6:3-4 Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend.

4Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. **[Don't "sleep on it." Take care of the problem quickly.]**

Matt 18:15-17 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

There are many times when someone might bungle a situation. They might have to point out something unpleasant. But they are given in good faith. The wounds from a friend are to be

¹The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert, an English professor's journey into Christian faith

preferred.

Prov 27:6 Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts, nor measure words, but to pour them all out just as they are, chaff and grain together knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then, with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.

– George Eliot

Prov 27:17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

We like to recognize the benefit how friends can sharpen each other. We understand that this means we can learn from each other especially because we are different from each other in personality and life experience. What should not be overlooked is that this can be a grueling process. It doesn't say that cream puffs sharpen cream puffs. What we have to share comes from hardening experience. For example, it is hard to help someone who is naive. They think you are unfeeling and uncaring while they assume that all people are basically good. As we go through tough life experience together, our experiences serve to sharpen each other.

The first friendship in church is with Jesus. He did not look at His disciples as mere followers or apprentices. He saw them as friends.

John 11:11 These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

Later, the death of Lazarus and what everyone was going through gave us the shortest verse in the Bible:

John 11:35 Jesus wept.

He knew He was about to raise him up, but this did not overshadow His compassion for all His friends.

The love of Christ for mankind was not just something that was part of the definition of God. His dying for man's salvation was the greatest transaction in all of eternity, but it is not just a great theological truth. It is also very human.

John 15:12-13 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.
13Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

This is what made the dastardly deed of Judas so bad. How did he betray Christ? With a kiss. David prophesied about Judas' betrayal:

Ps 41:9 Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up *his* heel against me.

Matt 26:49-50 And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him.
50And Jesus said unto him, **Friend**, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

Jesus is still reaching out to mankind. He died for you not just so you can be saved from Hell, but also to bring you into a friendship with His family. Do you have Jesus as your best friend who died for you? Would you like to be part of the family of God? You can ask Christ to take your sin and judgment of Hell and give you a new life with a new meaning today.

Believers need the family of the church. The church needs the friendship of the children of God. While attending a graduation ceremony for a drug rehab where I interned, it was beautiful and yet sad at the end when everyone made a chain with arms around each other's shoulders and sang, "I Want to Know What Love is." That pop song was a reflection of what they had learned of relationship and friendship in the program. It was beautiful and yet so sad because there was one thing that would have made it complete: the bond of fellowship in Christ. Someone said there is nothing friendlier than a wet dog. Relationships can be messy and difficult, but the beauty of the bond of fellowship in Christ outshines all of the messiness. It's a pity we have to acknowledge that little caveat. Do you have a need to step up your participation in the family of God? Will you step up to do your part in the family of Christ? Do you have a grudge against a brother or sister? Would you like to commit yourself to be a member of this fellowship and be a full part of what it means to be fellowship of believers?

1. When ministry is not personal - Rom 16:17-20, Prov 22:10, Prov 22:24, Rom 2:11-13, 1Tim 1:19-20, Acts 15:36-40, 2Tim 4:11
2. Personal problems - Rom 12:9-10
3. Personal ministry - John 13:34-35, John 15:13-17, Prov 18:24, 17:17, 6:3-4, Matt 18:15-17, Prov 27:6, 27:17, John 11:11,35, John 15:12-13, Ps 41:9, Matt 26:49-50