

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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Sermon Title: Freedom in Christ Comes With Responsibility

Romans 15:1-3

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**INTRODUCTION:** Last week I spoke from Romans 14 about freedom in Christ and yielding to those who are spiritually weak. As you have heard me say before—guilt and shame sells. Guilt and shame has built a lot of buildings. Guilt and shame has grown a lot of churches. Guilt and shame has gotten a lot of people down the aisle. Guilt and shame are awful; conviction of the Holy Spirit is different. The product of guilt and shame is people who are afraid to think for themselves. Guilt and shame make people who believe that they have to follow rules—to make God happy. Guilt and shame make people who believe that if they stumble they can't be forgiven unless they go do a bunch of stuff to make up for it. Guilt and shame come from in my opinion a generation of preachers who were encouraged by our denominations to just pound the pulpit with guilt and shame.

What has all that guilt and shame preaching resulted in? The good side it has resulted in committed people. But, the downside of it is there are a lot of people who when they come to the end of their lives are not sure about their salvation. If you're not really understanding the principle here of last Sunday's sermon and this Sunday's sermon and freedom; I just encourage you to read the scripture pray and ask God to help you understand what freedom in Christ is all about. Because when Jesus came, he fulfilled the old law and the old law was no more.

**First**, IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STRONG TO HELP THE WEAK

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 15: 1-3 <sup>1</sup> *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.* <sup>2</sup> *Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.* <sup>3</sup> *For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."* [Quote of Psalm 69]

**EXPLANATION:** It goes without saying some people are stronger than others. One could read these verses to mean we should build up those who don't have self-confidence. Some people are less confident than others. It makes sense that being reared to have self-confidence and getting some type of training and education would make a person strong, but it doesn't really work like that, does it?

One could also read this to mean benevolence. Benevolence is the first thing that probably comes to our mind when we read a scripture about helping the weak. In my years of ministry and in my years growing up in a pastor's home, I'm sure I've been involved in a hundred or more benevolence cases, and I've concluded most of them were not legit. These days, I'm pretty hard-sell on benevolence.

**EXPLANATION:** But in this case, Paul is not talking about self-confidence or financial benevolence. Thayer's Greek Lexicon suggests that the Greek word that's translated into English is used *figuratively of Christians whose faith is not yet quite firm*. He's talking about spiritual benevolence. Think about that term: spiritual benevolence.

What exactly is that? Romans 14, covered how the stronger person should yield to the weaker person. The examples Paul uses are food and days considered sacred. Here are a couple of real-life examples. I've had a few meals with people who believed eating pork was wrong. I've had a few meals with people who believed any meat was wrong...not because they felt sorry for animals, but because of their religious beliefs. In those cases, I kept in line with their dietary habits because my desire was to foster friendship with the opportunity to share the Lord with them at some point. And with sacred days – here's an example: When I lead mission trips out of the country, I find out what the host pastor's beliefs are regarding eating out or buying groceries on Sundays. If the pastor abstains from those things, then I'll abstain.

**APPLICATION:** Here in Chapter 15, Paul expands the principal from *yielding* to the weaker person in chapter 14 to *build up* the weaker person.

How do you build up the spiritual weaker people?

- You don't do it by stating that's what you are doing! "You are weaker, so I am going to build you up."
- You don't do it by being a jerk and purposefully offending others.

You do it by following Romans 14 by yielding to them. And chapter 15 tells us the reason for helping those spiritually weak: to build them up. And hopefully, in turn, they will help the weak.

The truth is, however, some people may never find freedom in the areas where you have freedom.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I was invited to a meal of ethnic people. I wondered what we would eat since many of them came from countries that did not eat pork for religious reasons. Well, we had some great Bar B Q pork and I made a joke, “We’ll know they are Christians by their pork.” You see, they were free from the old rules.

**EXPLANATION:** The truth is, some people may never have freedom in the same areas as you. The Apostle Paul dealt with this in I Corinthians 8 where some wondered if it was OK to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

**SCRIPTURE:** I Corinthians 8:4-13 *“<sup>4</sup> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.” <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.*

*<sup>7</sup> But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.*

*<sup>9</sup> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup> For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? <sup>11</sup> So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. <sup>12</sup> When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul is talking about people who had come out of this lifestyle of idolatry and they’d become Christians they were new Christians, they had been

so caught up in idolatry and sacrifices to idols they wanted to avoid it at all cost. Where is Paul and other people who had grown in their faith realized, there's only one God. So, this meat sacrificed to these idols it wasn't really sacrifice to any gods because there are no gods but one. The principle here is so crystal clear; surely no one hearing his message would not understand it. This was a real-world issue and while it may not be a real word issue for most of us today, it's the principle behind it that we need to be aware of: yield to the weaker person so that you can build the person up. And from personal experience, we should keep in mind some may never be built up.

## **Second, IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STONG TO EMULATE CHRIST**

**SCRIPTURE:** Look at Romans 15:3<sup>3</sup> *For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."*

Christ put others' needs before his...

I could go in several directions here, but I want to tell you a story. One I witnessed.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A boy came to church one Sunday in a pair of designer overalls when they were popular. And the style was to have only one strap connected. When the boy got to church his grandfather, who was a retired minister, clobbered him and told him "at church we are supposed to give God our best, which includes dressing our best." He's been raised to believe that. You see, in the grandfather's mind overalls were farm clothes and not suitable for church. The interesting thing though was that the grandfather's suit and tie were out of style.

In the boy's mind, his overalls were his best. In the grandfather's mind his suit was his best. In this case, who blew it? The grandfather. He was really rough on his grandson and he violated the principle of yielding. **DID IT REALLY MATTER WHAT THE BOY WORE? NO!**

Let's look at his statement to his grandson: On Sunday we are supposed to give God our best and means dressing our best. Does that mean on other days it doesn't matter?

**SCRIPTURE:** Look back at Chapter 14, verse 5: *One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should*

*be fully convinced in their own mind.* <sup>6</sup> *Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord.*

To the grandfather, Sunday was more sacred than other days; the problem was he expected everyone else to dress like he did on his sacred day.

Eventually, the boy and his mother dropped out of the church. I wonder if it had anything to do with the grandfather's superior attitude.

**APPLICATION:** There is another application for all of us on this topic. Romans 14 instructs not to quarrel over disputable matters. If we emulate Christ, we won't do that. We get lost in disputable matters when we're caught in the *I-was-always-raised-to-believe* syndrome regarding things that aren't biblical.

If you have kids it's important to pass along family traditions, but on things that are not in the Bible you really need to add the tag I mentioned last week, "*...but someday you'll have to make up your own mind on the issue.*" If we are carrying on spiritual beliefs that are not biblical but they are just tradition it is possible those beliefs create bondage. It's possible I am in bondage and don't realize it. I certainly don't want my kids to continue the bondage. That's why it's important to say things like, "*Kids, the Bible doesn't really speak to this issue, but this is the way I do it and someday you'll have to make up your own mind.*"

**CONCLUSION:** Let me make another appeal today for those in bondage. You can be set free today.

If you have never repented of sin and believed in Jesus, you may not know it, but you are in bondage. Once you are set free you'll realize the bondage you were in. The scripture tells you to repent and believe.

And now to believers in Jesus – it's possible for you to know Jesus yet be in spiritual bondage. You may have had a steady diet of guilt and shame preaching which was delivered with a lot of yelling and pounding of the pulpit. It's that's all you've known, then you've *been-raise-to-believe* that God is an angry God and you must perform in order for him to accept you. You've *been-raised-to-believe* that you can do something to pay back God for forgiving you of your sin -- maybe not implicitly but subtly. Folks, we can't do anything for ourselves in the spiritual realm, if so, then we wouldn't need Jesus. The atonement of Jesus provides a way for us.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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