

Loving Your Neighbor

Romans 15:2

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

If you just think of the person sitting beside you at this moment or you think of the person that you live at home with -- might be your husband or wife, or it might be your friend or a roommate -- or you think of the colleagues that you have at work through the week, what should your attitude to them be?

What should your attitude be? The negative side of that attitude we talked about last Sunday and maybe you'd look at where it is mentioned. It's Romans Chapter 15, in that Black Bible there. And it's Romans 15:1, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

And you remember we looked at the Greek verb for "bear" is "bastedzein". It's actually the verb that is used in that verse that we all know, "Surely he has borne our griefs [sicknesses] and carried our sorrows [pains]. [Isaiah 53:4] And you remember we shared last Sunday that that's the real spirit of "bear" here. The Revised Standard Version translation is inadequate. It says, "We who are strong" (those of us who are able) "ought to bear with the failings of the weak." Well, no, the Greek means, we ought to BEAR the failings of the weak, we ought to CARRY them -- not bear with them in the sense of put up with them. So, our attitude to the loved one sitting beside us or, to our friend at work, it's not to be an attitude of putting up with their failings or bearing with them, but bearing them.

If they are less able compared with us in regard to facing an aggressive salesman, then we're to bear the aggressive salesman for them. If they have trouble with things like faucets or storm windows, we're to bear that. We are to bear it and do it and carry it for them. We've to absorb it for them. Just as Jesus bore our sins, bore our AIDS -- because not everybody who has AIDS are the only people who have AIDS. There are many others that Jesus has borne the AIDS for them. Jesus bore our AIDS. He bore our ulcers, he bore our sins and bore our pains and our agonies and absorbed them in his own body.

And then as God, his Father looked down and said, "What is that?" and he was pointing at you. Jesus said, "Oh, she is my thumb or he is my finger, they are part of me and the clean, fresh body that I have, that's who they are. They are part of my body." That's the sense in which we have to bear the weaknesses and failings of those less able than ourselves. We're to cover up. We're to cover up for them.

If they mess up an arrangement for an evening out, we've to cover up. We've to cover it up. We've to enable them to ignore it, to hardly notice it. That's what it means to bear the failings of the weak. We are always to be absorbing things for somebody else who can't carry it themselves. Now, that's just the negative side, loved ones, of that.

Why are we to do that? Well, the verse that we're studying today explains it. So, maybe you'd look at it in the same chapter and the next verse. It's Romans 15:2. We've to do that for this reason. "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him." That's a pretty important verse in our society today. Because I don't know about you, but what I have noticed about us in our society

is-- the worse we all get, the wickeder our society becomes, the more judgmental we become of each other. Really, we do.

The worse our society becomes, the more judgmental we become of each other. The quicker we are to rebuke each other, the quicker we are to reprove each other. It's incredible, but for such an evil society, an awful lot of us are very self righteous and we are always telling each other where to get off.

And, of course, that's what God prophesied would happen. In Galatians 5:14, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you are not consumed by one another." I don't know about you, but I get a lot of that today. That we're busy biting and devouring each other and we are rebuking each other and we are proving each other and we all know where everybody else is wrong and we all have become so rich and so perfect and so self righteous, that we are able to tell everybody else where to get off. And you know that's the mark of the last days. As we all get worse and worse, we'll get more and more self-righteous.

And, loved ones, God's word is directly the opposite to that. He says here in Romans 15:2, "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good." Not bite and devour them, not tear them apart, not rebuke and reprove them, not criticize them up and down, but "please his neighbor for his good", to edify him. Now, you may say, "Wait a minute, please his neighbour? I mean surely that's something that this Bible says you shouldn't do. We are not here to please people. Look at that verse in Galatians 1:10, 'Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.'"

So, there is one of those verses, where Paul is obviously saying, you shouldn't please men, you shouldn't try to please men. If you are still pleasing men, you are not a servant of Christ. So, there appears to be a contradiction. In Romans 15:2 he says, "Let us please our neighbor for his good to edify him." Yet here he's saying, you can't please men and be a servant of Christ at the same time.

Obviously, whenever you come into a situation like that in the Bible, you know that it's the inadequacy of our English language that is at fault. That we're trying to speak something that is such infinite truth that our language is not able to express it perfectly. So what we have to do is see in what sense are we to please men and in what sense are we not to please men, because obviously that's what the Bible means.

It means that there is some way in which we've to please our neighbor and there is some way in which we're not to please our neighbor. In what way are we not to please our neighbor? Well, loved ones it's there in Ephesians 6:6, "not in the way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

Do you know what eye service is? Eye service is serving the eyes. It's what a little three or four year old guy does when his parents have made the mistake of inviting visitors to the home, and the three or four year old has decided this is the time when I should show off. And the little three or four year old just keeps watching the adults eyes and he keeps working at it until he gets them responding. He is like a little comedian. He just watches the eyes and he does the little tricks and the little funny things until he finally gets the adults to respond with their eyes and then he just goes to it. That's what eye service is.

It's doing things because you're getting a response of approval from the people around you. Now, of course, as we grow up and we go past the age of three or four and we get up to the age of 24 or 34 or 54 or 64, of course we leave all that behind us? No, no, we change the name. We don't call it showing off, we call it peer approval, or we call it receiving recognition from your peers.

That's the "pleasing men" that we're not to be involved in. We're not to be involved in doing things just to get the approval of people or just to get the recognition of people -- because that is always fickle and changeable and very shallow. And God says we're to live as people who please Him; please Him who looks not just on the outward actions but on the inward heart. He is the one who really knows whether you are pleasing or not.

And we're to live our lives not to please men but to please God because he looks on your inward heart and he can see what you're really like. Anyway, his approval is the only one that finally matters. So in that way, we're not to please men, we're to please God.

In what way are we to please our neighbors? Well, I'll show you, loved ones, in that lesson that we read today in 1 Corinthians 9. Paul states it very strongly and repeatedly in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law -- though not being myself under the law -- that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law -- not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ -- that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." That's it.

We've to become all things to all men if by any means we might save some. In that sense we've to please our neighbor. We've to please our neighbor for one primary purpose and there it is in Romans 15:2. "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him." The word for "please" is "aresketau" in Greek. It means "be agreeable to", "be agreeable to." God is saying to each one of us this morning, be agreeable to your husband, be agreeable to your wife, be agreeable to your roommate, be agreeable to your friend, be agreeable to your colleagues at work; be agreeable to them, and be pleasant to them.

When you get up in the morning, comment upon the wonder of the morning or the beauty of the morning. Say something that will be uplifting to them and will encourage them. That's your responsibility. No, you haven't the right to please yourself in the morning, you haven't the right to get up like a bear and grunt and blast out of the house without a word. You haven't that right. You've a responsibility to please the person that you live with, to be agreeable to them, to say something to them that will uplift them.

Loved ones, do you know that it is not particularly Christian? Did you know that clearly, that's just being civilized, as opposed to being savages? Why do we call it good manners? Manners, because it's the way man behaves as opposed to the way that the beast behaves. That's it. Being pleasant to each other is not just old fashioned, it's not just good manners that you should do if you're in form. It is what separates us from the beasts. If you don't do that, your relationship with your wife, or your relationship with your husband, or your relationship with your children, or your relationship with your colleagues at work eventually deteriorate -- and sink from a relationship of two human beings to one another, to a relationship of two things; two animals to one another. Your

relationship will deteriorate the whole way down. God says let us be agreeable to one another, let us be pleasing to one another.

There's another reason for it. A person whom you're trying to help -- a person to whom you're trying to do good (because that's why you should be pleasing. You should be pleasing for their good, to edify them) -- a person whom you are trying to edify or whose good you are trying to do, hear this -- it's a great secret that I am going to share with you. They won't receive any good from you unless they think you like them. That's right; they won't receive any good from you unless they think you like them.

Unless you are pleasant to a person, unless you are agreeable with them and agreeable to them, they won't receive any good from you. Now why I say that and why I am not just being funny when I say it is, you know what's "in" these days. What's in is surly and sexy, right? Surly and sexy is in. It's the dumbest thing.

It's one of Satan's games to destroy our society but that's what's in. It used to be that when old Bob Hope and the other guys were on, you felt they were entertainers, they wanted to entertain you and they wanted to uplift you. Now, no, if you want to be successful, be surly and sexy. Appear not to have any interest in your audience at all, appear to absolutely despise them -- and you'll be popular.

Well, loved ones it's not true, it's a lie of Satan. People will not receive anything from you, unless you are pleasant to them, unless you are agreeable with them. The version of it that is inside Christendom, is "speak the word in truth". That's it. Not surly and sexy but "speak the word in truth". I just want to speak the word in truth to you brother, speak the truth in love. I want to speak the truth in love, with emphasis on "truth" and weak in "the love".

It doesn't work, it doesn't work. Speaking the truth in love means that that person has to know and be sure that you are willing to lay your life down for them, not just because you say it but because they feel it. And there are very few of us who can afford to speak the truth in love.

And that's why Satan's lie is so powerful in these days. Throughout the secular world, marriages are breaking up everywhere, relationships are disintegrating. Actually, in Christendom the same is happening; relationships are disintegrating, things are breaking up.

We smile about the days of the old institutions but the old institutions and the miserable old Victorians manage to hold things together. They manage to bring families together and they manage to bring people together and create things. Our society is the society of surliness, sexiness and speaking the truth in love to each other. We're breaking up all around us -- our institutions are fragmenting, people are disintegrating and families are breaking up.

Because the truth is -- you can only do a person good, if you are pleasant to them, if you are agreeable with them. If in some way you are pleasant, then a person will be able to receive something. Now, why be pleasant to them? Well, do you see it in Romans 15:2? "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good." We do it for his good. We want to be agreeable with our husband, our wife, our friend, our colleagues at work, our fellow students, our roommates, we want to please them, we want to be agreeable to them, and we want to be pleasant to them for their good.

Now what is the good? Well, it's defined there in Romans 8, if you look back a few pages and you

remember this famous verse we all know in verse 28. And then the good is defined in verse 29. So, Romans 8:28, "We know that in everything God works for good." Now, the good is defined in the next verse. "...for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined [and here is the good] to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first born among many brethren."

That's the good to be conformed to -- the image of God's Son -- because only those of us who are conformed to the image of God's Son will live with God forever. And so we've to be pleasant and to be agreeable to one another for each other's good, to enable each other to come into the likeness of Jesus, so that we live forever and do not go to hell and die eternally in loneliness.

Now, you have only got so long, see. You have only got so long for that. You don't have endless mornings. You think you have. But, the mornings go fast. A few of you knew Gus Young. Gus was a coach in one of the colleges. He is not here anymore. Bill Wallis would be 35, 36 now. He is not here anymore. He was drowned in Lake Superior. Rick Olander would be about that age. He was drowned up at Forest Lake.

My dad isn't here, my mother isn't here, some of your dads and mums aren't here and there'll come a morning when your wife won't be here. There'll come a morning when your husband won't be here, there'll come a morning when your son won't be here or your daughter. There'll come a morning when your colleague at work won't turn up for work. There'll come a morning when your roommate won't be here.

You don't have forever. Death, loved ones, is not just another great experience. It's not just another great part of the rich tapestry of life. Death is it. That's it, that's it. You don't have another go, and you don't have another shot at it. It comes once and then the Bible says comes the judgment.

You and I have a few days. That's the best way to look at it because the days go so fast. You and I have a few days here to be pleasant with each other. We have a few days here to be agreeable with each other -- to bring each other into our likeness to Christ -- just a few days. And then there'll be nothing and you no longer have any days.

These are precious days, loved ones. These are precious days. If you say to me, how do you bring them into conformity of Jesus? Do I tell them when they're not being like Jesus? Do I rebuke them that they are not being like him? Do I preach to them and teach them how to become like him? Do I tell them what he is like? No, I've never done that. It's already all been done.

Look at Romans in Chapter 6. It's already been done. All they need is to believe it. It's Romans 6:3-4, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus [were baptized years ago from before the foundation of the world] were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." So, it's all been done. And there is only one thing that we have to do, and that's in Romans 6:11, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." That's how you bring a person into conformity to Jesus.

She is physically tired and probably emotionally tired too. And she ought to get up and get the children out and that's her duty. All good wives and mothers do that and I have my own work to attend to and I have my car to get started. So, she is physically a bit weak and that's why she

says, "I can't get up this morning, love." But, she is emotionally down too. How to bring her into the conformity of Jesus? Edify her, edify her, it's from a Latin word "aedificio", and it means "to build up, build up". Build her up into what she is in Jesus. She is being buried with Jesus, she is being raised with Jesus; it's all been done. Help her to know that. "Sure love, lie there, I'll get the children out and I'll pray that Jesus will give you his own strength through this day." That's it.

That's how you do it. You're pleasant, you are agreeable, you bear the weakness and you do everything to lift them up into what they are in -- because if once they begin to exercise that faith, they'll take off. And your job is to lift them into that faith and not to beat them down or to rebuke them, but to lift them into the faith. So, he's struggling with the faucet. He's a man, he should be able to fix a faucet, and it's not hard to put a washer in a faucet. The poor guy is struggling with it and he's trying to rush out to do something else. And you say to him, "Love, it doesn't matter about the faucet." And it actually does matter. But you say it doesn't matter. "I'll manage without it and we'll get it fixed; we'll get that fixed later on. I know you didn't do it and I'll pray that Jesus will show you the way to do it. It'll come." That's it. That's it.

She's going out and once more leaves the dirty dishes. So you say, "You go on, love, you have to get to that appointment. I'll do the dishes." You absorb, you absorb, you absorb, you absorb; you're agreeable to, you please, you lift up into faith.

That's it. Why? And I'll tell you as a sailor why. As a sailor, we depend utterly on the wind and the wind is always there, virtually always there, there's some wind. However weak it is, there's usually some wind and your job is to set your sail right. Usually your main sail is wrong, so that it catches the wind. We've even light sails that we set for very light wind.

So, to a good sailor, it doesn't matter how little the wind is, he can set his sails right to catch the wind. That's all he's got to do. He doesn't have to do much more. He can hold on to the tiller, something to keep the boat pointed the right way, but all he has to do is set the sails right and the wind catches them and it's the wind that takes him. There is a mighty wind from the hill of Calvary that is blowing on you, blowing on each one of you, blowing on your loved ones. It's there.

Get them to set the sails right and the wind will carry them and it will carry them into the likeness of Jesus. All you have to do is get them to set the sails right. You do that by being agreeable to them, by being pleasant to them for their good, by lifting them up into the faith, by doing everything to get them to catch it themselves, get them to catch it. If once they catch it, they'll know it.

If once they exercise faith in what God has done in transforming them in Jesus -- if once that dear guy who is struggling with the faucet begins to catch the sense that Christ is in him and that Christ is able to see what the problem is with that washer -- he'll lift into it and he'll do it. If she, lying in bed -- half physical, half emotional, half other things -- if she is once able to see that Christ is in her, that she was buried and baptized with him and raised up with him and that's her real position and the Savior is inside her and he has strength where she has not -- if she is once able to even for a moment exercise faith in that and experience the benefit of it, then she is up and running and she is beginning to move into the conformity of Jesus, that God has already wrought for her.

We are a pitiful crowd; we are a pitiful group, we human beings. We are a poor miserable lot of

little creatures. We need to help each other. That's what we need to do. We need to help each other. You need to lift that girl of yours, lift that guy of yours, lift that friend of yours at work. You need to lift them into it, because you see God has already put them in Jesus.

If once they catch it, if once they catch that wind from Calvary, they'll take off on their own. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good to edify him, to build him up. That's our one purpose here. That's it. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for your dear and good word. We thank you for Calvary and that all has already been done. We thank you Lord that our loved ones, our dear friends at work, don't really need anything. Everything has already been given them. The potential is there. Christ is within them. They are in Christ. All they have to do is believe it.

Lord, we see that faith is caught and not taught. So, Lord we commit ourselves to responding to them in faith. Always seeing them as in you, always seeing your strength as just there, just next to them, a breath away. So, that they too will catch that faith and will begin to move in it themselves.

And we thank you for the part that you've given us of being eternal encouragers, of being eternal burden bearers. Because we thank you, it's not us who do the bearing, it's you, and you are infinitely able. So, Lord we commit ourselves now each one of us, commit ourselves to such a life as this.

We now repent, wherever we have not lived like this, we repent of it now in dust and ashes and ask your forgiveness. And we commit ourselves to becoming men and women and not savages; to becoming your men and women, your sons and daughters and to behaving to our loved ones at home, to our friends at work and at school in the way that you yourself have behaved towards us, ever bearing our weaknesses and ever lifting us up positively, into reality. We thank you Lord, we commit ourselves to doing that this day and through the rest of the weeks of our years.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each of us throughout this week. Amen.