**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Sermon

*Romans Series - Chapter 15*

 ***The Ministry of The Lord***

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December 8th In the Year of Our Lord 2019

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS text is quoted)

**Romans 15:1**

Now we who are strong

ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength

and not just please ourselves.

 2 Each of us is to please his neighbor

 for his (his neighbor’s) good, to his 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 was written in earlier times

was written for our instruction,

so that through perseverance and the encouragement

of the Scriptures we might have hope.

 5 Now may the God

who gives perseverance and encouragement

grant you to be of the same mind with one another

according to Christ Jesus,

 6 so that with one accord

you may with one voice

**glorify** the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Despite popular public opinion, we are not all created equal. The American Constitution established the law of the land that all people are to be treated the same by the Federal Government. It was not until after the Civil War (1868) that the 14th Amendment established that no state shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. There needs to be a distinction made that the government is to treat everyone the same, but, in reality, we are all different. I can try to go to a professional ice hockey team and demand that they make be a member of their team because they do not have a person who cannot skate on their team, but they would deny me a position based upon their qualification that all players must be able to skate. You know what this means? I will never get a participation trophy for ice hockey. We are all different. We are all not going to set athletic records. As a society, we have a responsibility to lift-up those who are lacking physical and material assets. Being a Christian country, America has more benevolent organizations than any country in the world. Ministering to those who are in need is a part of the American Christian DNA. It was recorded that in 2017 America gave over 50 billion dollars to foreign aid (Wikipedia). Domestically, America spends more on social and human services than the nation’s defense.

In the book of Romans, Paul points to the strong and their responsibility to help the weak. He is writing to Believers. We can see this is a characteristic of the Believer’s community that must be practiced. There must have been some kind of problem, or Paul would not have brought this subject to their attention.

The reality in Paul’s world, and in ours, is that there are strong and weak Believers. These weaknesses could be physical, emotional, spiritual, economic, educational or material. He does not point-out what the specific strengths and weaknesses are but does call for the strong to help the weak. Lending to whatever their weakness may be, the strong should assist them.

It is the love of Christ in the Believer that drives them to assist the weak. It is not a goal to collect saintly merits to retain salvation or work-off years of a purgatory sentence. It is no longer the Believer you see but God at work in them.

**Galatians 2:20** "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Paul further expounds upon the condition of the weak and describes them as “without strength.” Paul must have had knowledge of those who simply could not take care of themselves in whatever deficiency they had. This seems a bit far-fetched, but there are people who do not know how to navigate through some basic life challenges.

Many of us have served in public positions. In the course of my patrol duties with the Houston Police Department, we issued traffic citations. Early in my career, I could see that the Law should consider life’s circumstances. I stopped an elderly lady one day, because her license plate sticker had expired. In those days, the yearly tax sticker was not on the front windshield as it is today. I stopped her and asked her why she had allowed her license plate to expire. She looked confused and started crying. I was as polite as I could be and did not understand why a little thing like an expired license plate should upset her. Through tears, she explained that her husband died a few months ago and he took care of the cars. Well, at that point, I could not write her a ticket. I could see she was in a weakened state and a traffic citation was not the solution to her situation. The powerful city and the state would get along fine without issuing her a citation.

Recently, John and Donna Cole blessed us with their God-given musical talents. John likes to reminisce about the projects on which he and I worked as a ministry of the church. We assisted a widow woman who was building a log cabin. To be clear, she had hired someone to build the structure and was running low on funds to complete the project. One such ministry was to install a self-composting toilet complete with overflow drain and roof vent. The widow woman obviously could not install the unit. She was attempting to ‘get by’ without having to install a septic system that costthousands of dollars. You never know where following the Lord in assisting people might lead.

I have talked recently about a man who was not a member of the Fellowship, who needed surgery to remove a cancerous growth from his face (forehead). He was not from America and did not speak English. He was a laborer and obviously did not have the $33K to pay to the hospital for the procedure. In time, he would die from the spread of the disease. I went to the hospital and explained the financial situation to the business office. I asked them how much the bill would be if we paid cash. They said $11k. I went back to the Fellowship, and, due to the spiritual condition of Believers, money was raised to pay the hospital bill in full. This was about eight years ago. The man is alive today.

**Giving is Glorifying God**

 All things we do are to glorify God. Our actions and statements are to glorify God. This does not mean that there will not be conflicts in our lives. The reality is that we struggle to glorify God on a daily basis. Many reject God and Believers who follow Him. Regardless of how the fallen world operates, we Believers are responsible to the Lord.

**What is the Foundation of God’s Giving?**

God created our world and us. Thus, here is a news flash: “He is the stronger being.” Here is another news flash: “The core of God’s strength is His love.” We can possess all things and be all-powerful, but, if we don’t have love, we are nothing and have nothing (1 Corinthians 13). We shall never forget that God is love (1 John 4:8). God so loved the world that He incarnated Himself as Jesus Christ and came to live our lives and save our lives from an eternity without Him (John 3:16). We shall never forget that God knew before the foundation of the world our need for salvation. God knew that we could not save ourselves and any attempt to do so would lead to further enslavement in sin. Humanity’s history dots the secular cultural landscape with one scheme after another to replace His love. God’s love saves, and there isn’t any other. God’s love is the only power in the universe that saves fallen humanity from death and sin.

The reason God calls upon Believers to assist the weak is to, yes, assist them, but, through this assistance, He demonstrates through Believers how He saves the world. God is more powerful than death or any sin. Take note: Satan never created anything. Satan never saved anyone from destruction. Satan preys upon the weak and seeks to destroy them. At that moment when a person is weak, Satan is there to test, to tempt them into his world of eternal darkness and separation form God.

God has Paul write to Believers in Rome instructing them to reach-out to the weak, to those without strength. This is to protect them and the whole body. We have noted the letter to Rome was addressed to Believers, and the context of chapter 15 surely includes Believers, but it is reasonable to extend assisting the weak to those outside of the community of Believers. By this, we witness to the lost. Once again, God reaches the lost with His love. Love is the goal of the Incarnation, the Cross. We know that God looked from the Cross and called-out, “Father forgive them for they do not know what they do.” In this instance in time, those who thought they were strong, in crucifying Jesus, were actually the weak in need of forgiveness.

Therefore, the ministry of assisting the weak is evangelism. The ministry of reaching-out and picking those up who are not as strong is an eternal commitment that God ordains.

**Jesus raises Lazarus**

**Jesus calls Lazarus to come forth from his tomb**

**Two Sisters, Mary and Martha**

**John 11:1**

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany,

the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

 2 It was the Mary who

anointed the Lord with ointment,

and wiped His feet with her hair,

whose brother Lazarus was sick.

 3 So the sisters sent word to Him, saying,

"Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

 4 But when Jesus heard this, He said,

"This sickness is not to end in death,

**but for the glory of God,**

**so that the Son of God may be glorified by it."**

 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

 6 So when He heard that he was sick,

He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.

Many of us know the rest of the account given by John. Jesus goes and calls Lazarus from the tomb. Before Jesus raised Lazarus, both sisters, Mary and Martha, stated to Jesus that if he would have been there sooner their brother would not have died. This is an expected human response. We take note that after Jesus was told about Lazarus’ condition, He stayed two days longer. Is this because He did not care? No. God as Jesus knew what He was going to do with Lazarus. Remember, Jesus already proclaimed that Lazarus’ sickness was not to end in death but was for the glory of God.

**John 11:21-27**

21 Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

 24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,

 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

 27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."

God as Jesus is the stronger and calls Lazarus, the weaker, from the tomb, from the dead. God the *Creator* is God the *Resurrector*. God has the power to create life and thus the power to resurrect life. This is logical and reasonable. Jesus went to Lazarus’ tomb and ordered the stone to be rolled away. Mary told Jesus that her brother had been in the tomb for four days and by this time there would be stench. What was Jesus’ response?

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

 41 So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.

 42 "I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me."

 43 When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."

 (John 11:40-43)

God/Jesus saves those who cannot save themselves. We are all weak. This means everybody. There is not one righteous (Romans 3:10). *Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins* (Ecclesiastes 7:20). People are inherently weak. The theological term is “totally depraved.”

God’s love is so powerful that He looks down from the Cross and sees the weak, those without the strength to save themselves. He affords them the opportunity to surrender to Him. God’s “love-strength” reaches-out to the weak even through their rebellion and provides them the opportunity to surrender to Him.

Many of you know that Renee was diagnosed this past week with cancer. We knew that God already had a plan for her life. I knew that when I was diagnosed with cancer that God had a plan for my life. Did God plan for us to get cancer? No. Getting cancer is the product of living in a fallen world. The product of being a Believer is graduating to an eternal life. We know the whole creation calls-out for salvation (Romans 8:18ff). We know we have already been used by God for His glory. We are not short-sighted. We are at peace with graduating to our eternal lives with Him. At the same time, this life that God gave us pulls on us. We, like you, have relationships that we do not want to leave. But we know there will only be a short time when we will be reunited with our loved ones. I also believe that God is not finished with our lives. Regardless of how we feel, we rely upon God’s plan to glorify Him. Through this, we are lifted-up. There isn’t any hesitation in Renee or me. Her illness will be used to glorify God.

How is this worldview, this belief, possible? There is a simple answer that has already been provided and experienced.

**Galatians 2:20** "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

The difference in the Believer’s life, when temporal life-threatening illness comes, is how we respond. Yes, it is challenging and emotional. At the same time, there is resolve that God moves in this fallen world and indwells Believers.

**Romans 8:11** But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

 If it is God’s will, we can be healed. It is obvious, that it is not God’s will that all of us survive life-threatening diseases. Jesus did not heal everyone on the planet during the incarnation. But through healing or not, we have the power of the resurrected Lord at work in us. He has called us to be His witness to, and through, the end of the temporal life. His light in us sustains us through death’s door. We will never escape temporal death. God did not design this creation for us to escape temporal death. God did design the creation for us to be with Him, our Creator, for an eternity. To access God’s eternal plan, we are invited to surrender to Him. We Believers will never be separated from God.

Romans 8:35-39

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are not promised a life without illness. God has planned that this temporal life will end. This is the prerequisite life to the eternal life. What we are promised is that the Lord will not abandon us in our time of illness.

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10**

9 And He has said to me,

"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties,

for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

**Romans 8:35** Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Ephesians 2:8-10 states that we are God’s workmanship created for good works which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;

 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, **which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**

 Things may not go smoothly in life, and when the illness and devastations come our way, how do we respond? Do we look for God to be at work in these circumstances? Yes, we do.

During the course of identifying and planning a treatment for Renee’s illness, we could see and feel the Lord’s presence. Direction was given from surprising sources. Renee’s diagnoses identified a rare cancer that only about one-thousand people get a year. The miracle? Through relationships established over twenty years ago, God put us in contact immediately with one of those patients who was two years removed from surgery and cancer free.

Were there tears and fears of the humankind? Yes, but then the resolve of knowing that God has a plan for our lives, and all of this can be used to point to the Lord. This is what we are doing here today. Pointing to the Lord. Under the Lord’s direction, there have been many who have stepped forward shining light on the path we are to go.

Last week, we went to see an oncologist assigned to Renee during her time in the hospital after surgery. This visit was a matter of being processed through the doctors who happen to be there when Renee’s emergency surgery took place. Before visiting with her, we already had the answer to our most basic questions regarding future treatment. The visit with this doctor confirmed what we already knew. The outlook this particular oncologist gave was not good and she could over no sustainable solution. She was limited in her knowledge. But, then again, we already had been given the good news of a promising future with another hospital and team of doctors. God was already working in many people to pave the way for the best possible treatment.

Our experience is that being a Christian does not mean that bad things will not happen to us. It is how Christians respond to adversity that the difference is seen. It is our understanding of the world that gives us an advantage regarding keeping peace in our hearts. It is the peace of God that sustains us. The strong God we have is at work in our weak members.

We live in a fallen world, because love is a choice. For love to be a choice, then all the bad that is opposite of love is present for us also choose. For there to be freedom of choice, the creation also contains a world where the bad is unleashed to choose. The question is, “Choice over what?” Obviously, the choice is over the bad, what is not good. God determines what is good. During the creation God made declarations of what was good (Genesis 1, 2,3). The choice is to choose God as we live in a world that is fallen. God gave Adam this choice (Genesis 2:17). It is through this bad that God gave us the opportunity to surrender to Him, to live His plan for our lives. It is easy to be a person of God when the sun is shining, and you are healthy. But do we choose God through the mire of life? Do we choose God when we become ill? Faith is not a walk in the park. Faith sustains us through illness and death. We walk through death’s door with God’s love and faith in us.

 God as Jesus told the disciple in **John 14:1** that their hearts should not be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. **2** "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

 **3** "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

 **4 "**And you know the way where I am going."

Jesus tells the criminal on the cross, besides Him at the crucifixion, exactly where he was going. There is no doubt that upon his death, he was united with Jesus in the next life. This is an example of no time laps regarding entering our eternal life with the Lord.

**Luke 23:43** And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

God chose us through our sinful lives. Looking out from the Cross, God chose us and said, “Father forgive them.” Remember that God chose not to leave us here in this fallen state forever. He continues to give us an opportunity to surrender to Him. God does not want to lose one person (2 Peter 3:9).

God removed Adam and Eve from the Garden, so they would not eat from the Tree of Life in their fallen state (Genesis 3:22ff). Thus, they would have lived forever in their fallen state. God calls for us all to go through the door of temporal death. Our choice is to choose Him for an eternity. We will have an eternal life either way. One in darkness where there is the weeping and gnashing of teeth or one where there are no tears and love rules.

Rev. 21: 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

AMEN