I have some good news and some bad news this morning. The good news is that everyone who believes in Jesus for salvation is going to heaven. The bad news is we’re traveling there together!

It’s easy to get out of sorts with those around us, especially if they disagree with us, isn’t it? The story is told of a little boy sitting on the front steps, with his face cradled in his hands, looking very upset. His dad came home and asked what was wrong. His son looked up and said, ‘Well, just between us, Dad, I’m having trouble getting along with that wife of yours!’

Some of us perhaps have family friction and maybe we’ve experienced fractures in the family of God as well. If Satan can get us to become annoyed, upset, and out of sync with those whom we worship and serve our Lord with, our effectiveness will be compromised. As we’ve learned, whether we’re weaker or stronger, we must get along with one another even if we don’t agree on the non-essential things that aren’t addressed in the Bible. If we don’t work at it, our differences will become irritants and our unity will unravel. That’s why it’s vital we all follow the exhortation in Eph 4:3 to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

God’s most beautiful creation isn’t a magnificent mountain lake, a spectacular night sky, or even a newborn baby. The pinnacle of His creativity and His crowning achievement is the church. Eph 5 says Jesus loves the church so that she might be holy and blameless (27). The death of Jesus has removed the sins that have stained the church’s wedding gown. According to Eph 3:10, it’s through the church that God makes known His wisdom to the world. How is it possible that an organism that brings pleasure to God and unites people is often filled with complaints, grudges, bitterness, and disunity? If the Body of Christ is so beautiful, why do we bug each other so much? I mean, if we’re honest, we get annoyed by those who disagree with what we think about these non-essential things.

Our passage this morning gives us 3 ways we can better relate to those who don’t necessarily believe the same as we do in these neutral, non-moral things. Turn in your Bible to Rom 15 where we see that instead of avoiding or bad-mouthing those who differ from us, we must:

· Put up
· Build up
Next week, in vs 4 we'll see we need to...

& then in vs 5-6 we'll pick up 2 more:

PRAY

&

Speak up (6)

Rom 15:1

As we learned in Rom 14, Paul's writing to two different groups of people in the church: the weak & the strong, each group can annoy the other. The problem's where diet (whether or not to follow the OT dietary laws or eat meat sacrificed to idols) & days (whether some were holier than others).

The stronger Christians had no problem with diet or days while the weaker ones felt that some things weren't to be eaten &/or some days were special.

Everyone has opinions & preferences. It's easy to fall into thinking that the way we do things is the only proper way, right? My list is right & yours is wrong! Some even go out of their way to try to control how others think & behave, judging them according to their own lists. Let me make an important disclaimer once again: What we're talking about isn't a sin issue. If the Bible says it's wrong, it's wrong! We don't debate or give ground on that. But in areas the Bible doesn't speak, there's freedom. Those who disagree with you about these things aren't wrong, just different. While the person who disagrees with me about some of these things isn't sinning against me, I can very easily sin against him by my attitude & actions.

Put Up

The 1st thing we're called to do is to put up with people. Look at vs 1. If you're prone to being judgmental, this is a bitter pill to swallow. If you're the type of person who's sure you're right & must have your way, you won't like this at all. But if you have a problem with it, don't take it out on me. Take it up with God because this is His Word to us.

Stronger believers are to bear with the weaker believers. When Paul uses the word ought, he's saying we're obligated to be gracious with others. It means to be a debtor. We have a debt & our debt is to bear the weaknesses of others. This isn't a recommendation but a command. The strong need to limit their Christian liberty so they can reduce the problems of their brethren.
bear is n’t just enduring or tolerating someone; it means to personally shoulder a burden as if it was your own. It means to do something hard & costly for the sake of another. Ray Stedman writes, in regard to the stronger believer helping the weaker believer along, without forcing opinions or changes upon them that they aren’t ready for, the following:

We can compare this to crossing a swinging bridge over a mountain stream. Some people can run across a bridge like that even though it doesn’t have any handrails. They are n’t concerned about the swaying of the bridge, or the danger of falling into the torrent below. But others are very uncertain on such a bridge. They shake & tremble; they inch along. They may even get down on their hands & knees & crawl across the bridge. It’s like that with these grey areas. It would be cruel for someone who had the freedom to cross boldly to take the arm of someone who was timid & force him to run across. He might lose his balance & fall off the bridge.

If you’re strong in faith, & we all are in some ways though we’re weak in others, we owe it to other believers not to live to please ourselves. We’re to put up & bear with others. This doesn’t mean we grit our teeth & simply endure. It means to get underneath & help carry the load. It’s not just putting up with someone; it’s actively helping them. Stronger Christians need to come alongside weaker ones & nurture them so they become stronger & understand their freedoms in Christ more fully.

To bear with someone is to be willing to suspend judgment out of consideration for their weakness. We’re called to endure frustrations as we tolerate disputable matters about which we disagree. We’re challenged to restrain our natural reaction towards those who disagree by just letting them be themselves, without thinking they need to become just like us. It’s more than just being cordial toward them in a detached way. Instead, Paul calls us to be gracious in order to have closeness & fellowship & partnership with them. The key here is found in the last part of the vs: not just please ourselves. The word just isn’t in the Greek text. Literally rendered, Paul’s words make sense. We who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, & not please ourselves. That’s not easy though, is it? We all know our national anthem, right? Oh, say can you see, what’s in it for me? That’s the natural way. But we’re to please others in these matters. Don’t get me wrong. This doesn’t mean that living for Jesus isn’t pleasurable to us. It is. As we saw in Rom 14:22, happy blessedness...
flows from a deeply held faith in Jesus' promises & flows out into faithful living with a clean conscience.

Do you get more enjoyment out of pleasing yourself or in looking for ways to please others, even those you don't like? We must learn to live not to please ourselves, but to sacrificially serve others especially those who are weak for the sake of strengthening them & building God's kingdom. It's not living to please ourselves; it's living with others in mind. We are not to be full of our own importance. We may have a right to do something, but the Christian life is not about our rights. The Christian life is often about denying our rights. Even though we have the right to do this, we deny ourselves for the sake of others. For the sake of peace, for the sake of harmony, for the sake of the blessing of the community, we bear with our neighbors' weaknesses. Paul had this figured out pretty well when he wrote in 1 Cor 9:12:… we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Are you willing to put up with those who disagree with you so God's work continues to go forward? Eph 4:2 gives us 4 ways to do this: with all humility & gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love. 1st, we must deal with our pride issues, of always thinking we're right & everyone else is wrong. When we're humble, we'll put up with people because we'll be thinking of them & not ourselves. 2nd, we're to be gentle with those who believe differently than we do, recognizing that God deals graciously with us. 3rd, when we're patient with others we can help them grow in their faith & the understanding of their freedoms in Christ. & 4th, when we bear with others, we're to do so in an attitude of love, not indifference, bitterness, or hatred. Col 3:13 adds a 5th element: bearing with one another, forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Maybe you're having a hard time dealing with someone because you believe they've wronged you. They haven't accepted you or have treated you with contempt. Before you can bear with them, you may 1st need to forgive them for whatever they've done. We're not only to put up with others… 2. Build Up We're to build them up as well. Look at vs 2.
How do we bear the weaknesses of the weak and not please ourselves? Paul tells us here and his use of each of us leaves no room for exceptions. We are to please our neighbor. Throughout chpt 14 Paul speaks of the Christian's relationship to his fellow-believers using the term brother. Here he drops the brother & uses neighbor. By doing so he broadens the application of his teaching on love & liberty. Love not only requires that we do good to our brother but also to our neighbor, anyone we have contact with, including our enemies (12:17-21; Mt 5:43-48). If our neighbors don't see the self-sacrificing, compassionate care of Christ's people, they likely won't listen to our message about our Savior's sacrifice for and compassionate care of us. Why are we to please our neighbor?

2b It is about pleasing others in a way that is good for them & that builds them up in truth & faith. Those last words are key: for his good, to his edification. We should not try to please people with our own ideas of good for us. We should please people with God's ideas of good for them. Good is a term of usefulness, excellence, worthiness, fruitfulness. It designates what is honorable. We know what is good from God's definition of good, from who God is and what He says. So we please people for their good by strengthening their faith & knowledge & experience of God's goodness. It's a God-centered good we're striving for and the last phrase clarifies that further by adding that this good is for edification, for the building up of the Christian & the strengthening of the Christian community. We don't want to please people just to make them be quiet or stop fighting or get over their issues or to keep some sense of false peace where issues are never addressed. We want to please people for their God-centered good. We are commanded to please people in ways that lead to their experience of the goodness of God and His ways so they are built up in faith & knowledge & love & relationships. That's the right kind of people pleasing of vs 2.

When we bear with one another, we allow God to use us to help construct Christians. When we snipe at people, we help in the process of tearing them down or demolishing them. We're not to just endure those around us but instead we're to encourage them. Our goal is to please others for the purpose of their edification. We're to build others up spiritually. We're to follow the preferences of other believers with respect to our liberties. If your mother-in-law lives in the...
same town as you do & her conscience is violated by dancing, don't flaunt your freedom and dance in her presence. If your dad doesn't like cards, don't invite him to poker night.

The obligation of the church is for the stronger Christians who understand their freedom in Christ to come alongside & help bear the burden of the weak & help strengthen them & build them up. We're responsible for each other. God is committed to building people up & He's grieved when we destroy what He's constructing.

Is 57:14 says, Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstacle out of the way of My people. God doesn't want obstacles to stand in the way of a believer's growth. He longs for builders in the body of Christ. 1 Thes 5:11 says, Therefore encourage one another & build up one another. Every one of us as Christians is either in the construction or demolition business. We either build up or tear down others. We must cease & desist from every attitude & action which would tear down our neighbor, pressing on with those things which will build him up in his faith (14:19-20).

3. Look Up
We can put up when we build up, but we can only do so if we're looking up. Notice the vs starts with the word because it's explaining why pleasing others is the right way to live. It's right because it's what our perfect Lord Jesus Christ did. Yes, He fulfilled God's plan for His own pleasure in the Godhead, but He didn't cave in to what was easiest in His humanness. In that way, He didn't please Himself. He didn't lead His life as MC1st. No, He lived for others. He lived for you & all His people. He lived for those for whom He'd come to die & provide atonement & reconciliation.

Paul tells us in Phil 2, Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (5-8).

As we look up & fix our eyes on Jesus, we'll be reminded that He didn't come to be served but to serve & to give His life a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). We're to be seeking to be like Jesus rather than demanding that others be like us. Jesus came to this earth & suffered. He is the example. Throughout John's gospel we see Jesus came to do His Father's will. He came to please His Father.
& to bless us. That's the example we have. To maintain the unity within the church each of us must be concerned about conforming to Jesus. That means we seek to be like Him rather than try to make everyone be like us. Being like Him means we don't do what pleases us, but we do what pleases others, & ultimately, Him.

While we may expect Paul to give an example from Christ's life to support or illustrate this point, he instead quotes from the OT about a righteous sufferer who had zeal for God's house & yet was treated badly. Paul quotes Ps 69:9, a great messianic Psalm. The me in the quotation is Jesus; the You is God. Paul's point is Christ didn't think of His rights when He went to the cross. He thought only of our needs when He died for us. He endured every manner of taunting & suffering. Now, if the Son of God didn't please Himself when He went to the cross for us, how much more so ought we to seek to please our brothers & sisters in Christ? If Jesus could endure the insults of others, we should certainly be willing to put up with the minor irritations from Christians with different viewpoints.

Read Ps 69, & as you read it have Jesus before you & it will become clear to you what the psalm is about. It's a psalm about the suffering of Christ. It's a psalm about His self-denial. It's a psalm about Jesus becoming our sin bearer & substitute. It's a psalm that recalls how our Lord was ridiculed, spat upon, how He was denied & slandered by His enemies, estranged by His brothers, criticized by the rulers & drunkards sang obscene songs about Him.

Paul draws our attention to Jesus as our example, but the example he chooses to mention is more than an example, it's the act by which He saves us from the wrath of God. To become the kind of person who joyfully serves others rather than using them, consider Jesus. Look at Him. Especially look at His sin-bearing, substitutionary work on the cross. This is how we change: beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18). Look up to Christ. Jesus didn't please Himself & He took on reproaches that were not His to bear, so that good could come to us. That's the Good News of Scripture, that Jesus came from heaven as the God-man to endure what He never deserved. He never did anything wrong, but He suffered horrible wrongs against Him by those who hung Him on a cross to die. But that was all God's plan from the beginning, that a virgin-born Man, a seed of the
woman (Gen 3:15), would come to crush the devil serpent's head & defeat evil. That's what Jesus did on the cross, He conquered death & sin by receiving the punishment that sin deserved in bearing the Father's wrath for all who would trust Him. Then He rose again to prove His victory was accepted & complete. He did that to secure forgiveness & eternal life for us if we turn from sin to faith in Him. We get what Jesus earned & deserves instead of what our sinfulness should get because Jesus' death paid for those & His life secures us His righteousness. That's the love of Christ that poured out so strongly while He suffered reproach from sinful men. If you love & trust Jesus as Lord & Savior, then you'll want to be like Him in the strong love He showed. Rom 15:3 reminds us of that love of Christ to motivate us that our petty little sacrifices to serve others are nothing in comparison. To take up our cross & follow Jesus like He said involves loving others like He has.

Mt 17:8 describes a very exciting time for 3 of the disciples when they saw Jesus transfigured before their eyes. We need to do the same thing they did: lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself. Look up at Jesus & remember He puts up with you & He puts up with the person who's bugging you. Take your eyes off yourself & resist the urge to judge others in these non-essential areas. This willingness to please God even though it meant suffering & death is the key to our attitude. Jesus willingly endured all of this; He was indifferent to His own pain & agony. & He who bears all of this for the sake of pleasing the Father is our example. Rather than living life to please ourselves, we should follow the pattern of Jesus & be willing to suffer anything in pleasing one another. Jesus set aside His divine rights to be subject to the Father & to suffer for the sake of sinners to bring us to God. Can we do less for a fellow Christian?

A few suggestions:

1. Make a list of the people within the church who differ from you with their beliefs about these debatable issues. Then, look through the names & ask God to help you see people from His perspective.

2. Pray for those you have trouble with daily for 2 weeks. I guarantee your relationship with them will change if you pray for them by name for the next 14 days! Don't believe me? Try it!
3. Ask God to change you. As hard as I might try, rarely can I change someone else. The problem is not people, the problem is more personal, it's me, & I can ask God to do something about that.

4. Let go of grudges & forgive faults. Release your grip on a grudge or hurt feelings or they'll strangle you. The longer you hold on to them, the more they get hold of you. Is there someone you haven't forgiven? It's time to let go, forgive, & move forward for God's glory.

5. Restore a broken relationship. What positive step can you take this week to mend a fractured friendship? Do you need to make a call or have someone over?

6. Perform an act of service. Feelings tend to follow actions. If you wait for the feeling, you may be waiting a long time. When you serve someone who bugs you they'll be surprised & so will you! Say something nice about someone to a 3rd party, send them a note, or serve them in a way that they'll never know about. When you serve someone it will change how you see them. As long as we focus on pleasing ourselves, we are not following Christ. We often sing about following Jesus, but if we follow Him, the road always leads to the cross. There we must:

- Crucify our desires,
- Release our animosity,
- Give up our right to be right,
- Yield our will to the greater good,
- Listen instead of talking incessantly,
- Try to find common ground,
- Sow seeds of peace,
- Seek first the Kingdom of God,
- Stop trying to win every battle,
- Work for unity,
- Pray for wisdom,
- Lay down our personal agenda,
- Forgive those who have offended us,
- Ask forgiveness when we've offended others.

Doing these things is not easy, but it's a necessary part of living together with other Christians in the local church. Our calling is to be like Jesus, who endured the worst men could do to Him in order to please His Father & secure our salvation. Since that is our high calling, we should be able to overlook the many ways in which other Christians differ from us & get on with the task of building them up & then striving to grow together in the Christian life.
One of the secrets to a successful, healthy, growing, God-honoring church is to recognize that we're all different. God blends our differences, gifts, talents, & experiences into something beautiful He calls the church. Every one of you is a piece of God's puzzle at ABC.
How can we ever get along when we disagree? Look to the cross. Stand beneath the dying Son of God. Linger there for a while. Can you hear the reproaches of the mob cheering his suffering? They are happy with their evil deed. Having crucified the Lord of Glory, they make light of it. Finally, the troublemaker from Galilee gets what He deserves. Shouting with derision. Cheering His agony. Laughing at His tears. If you are the Christ, come down from the cross. Weakling! Imposter! One question begs for an answer: If He is the Son of God, why doesn’t He stop this? How could the Father let His Son suffer such indignity? Why doesn’t He call 10,000 angels? Why must the Holy One die like this? When He hung on the cross, condemned to death by evil men who plotted to murder Him, who produced lying witnesses to convict Him, as He surveyed the howling mob assembled to cheer His suffering, Jesus the Son of God, the One who knew no sin, the only truly innocent man who ever walked this sin-cursed planet, in His dying moments uttered words that still ring across the centuries: Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing (Lk 23:34). Those words sweep away all our excuses. They reveal the barrenness of our heart; they rip the cover off our petty differences; they expose our selfishness & pride.

A reader once wrote to Ann Landers: My 2 grown boys fight so much it’s impossible to have them at family gatherings. They don’t get along with their sister, she barely speaks to them. It’s barely worth all the hate that’s been generated. Any suggestions? You know how she in replies? Those stubborn fools will probably stay mad until there’s a death in the family. Wait until somebody dies. That’s the advice the world gives. Maybe there’ll be a reconciliation & maybe not. But in the household of God Someone has already died. It’s as though Paul is saying, will you not come together now because Someone has died? In thinking about all our Lord endured, Paul says simply, Christ did not please Himself. Whenever we crush the bread of communion between our teeth & swallow the cup representing His blood we cannot

Derek Thomas, www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/putting-others-first-as-jesus-did
escape the fact that He did not please Himself. As we remember Jesus & His atoning death for us, let me read a few vs from Ps 69.

Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; Those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies (4). Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; Dishonor has covered my face (7). For zeal for Your house has consumed me, & the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me (9).

In other words, our sins against God were placed upon Jesus, He became sin for us so we could be saved.

PRAY PASS

LE ME

Ps 69 continues, do not hide Your face from Your servant, for I am in distress; answer me quickly. Oh draw near to my soul & redeem it; Ransom me because of my enemies! You know my reproach & my shame & my dishonor…They also gave me gall for my food, & for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink…I am afflicted & in pain; May Your salvation, O God, set me securely on high (16-20; 29).

We eat of the bread remembering our Lord's death for us. We drink of the cup remembering Jesus' shed blood & death for our salvation.

Hughes, R. K. Romans: Righteousness from Heaven, p 281