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# The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Romans 15-1-13

Most of us are familiar with the movie "Castaway." In this movie, Tom Hanks finds himself stranded on an island all by himself for years. Lacking "fellowship" and a friend, he finds companionship with Wilson. Wilson is not a resident of the island or even a person. Rather, Wilson was a volleyball that washed up on the shore of the island. Tom Hanks drew a face on the volleyball and would have conversations with the volleyball face, Wilson, to keep his sanity while being deserted on the island. We simply need fellowship; we are not designed to be totally alone without community.

So, it makes sense for Christians to gather together into the community called the church. However, we human beings have this peculiar feature that we like to gather with people who are culturally and sociologically like us. We like to keep our groups small and narrow – it is just more comfortable for us. As they say, birds of the same feather flock together.

Christ's church, though, does not function this way. When Jesus spread His arms out on the cross to die for humanity, He drew all mankind unto Himself (see 15:7). And so, the

Church cannot be exclusive with respect to different cultural, sociological, and economic backgrounds. There is no such thing as favoritism in Christ's church.

In Galatians chapter 3, Paul says that there is no such thing as Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, etc. Furthermore, Paul is not speaking about equal rights or civil rights, but rather, he is speaking about the fact that status, sex, ability, finances, etc. do nothing and contribute nothing to the forgiveness of sins. This passage in Galatians 3 shows us that we are sinners saved solely by grace through faith on account of Christ alone.

And so, in the church, we have different people colliding together in the waters of baptism and at the Lord's Table as one. And as we gather together as one, every single person in the church is called to serve and please their fellow Christian.

But what does it mean to please a neighbor? Well, it certainly does not mean to pander to our neighbors sinful wishes. Way too often the church becomes

trapped to satisfying a member's sinful desires believing the old business term, "The customer is always right!" Nope, the customer is not always right in the church! That is to say; like an obnoxious crying child in a family who gets a lollipop to be quieted from their crying, churches can too easily give into appeasing the sinful desires of loud and obnoxious members.

What the Apostle Paul means by pleasing a neighbor is to work toward the goal of the neighbor's salvation by edifying and encouraging them in the Gospel. But take a special note that how a person pleases their neighbor is dependent upon their vocation in life. Pastors please their flock by being faithful to the Word of God. Trustees please their neighbor by making sure lightbulbs are fixed so that the words in the hymnal may be seen. Elders please their neighbor by assisting the pastor with communion for the sake of good order. Hospitality committees please their neighbor by cooking delicious food to bless a grieving family after the death of a loved one. Choirs please their neighbor by singing the Gospel into their ears. And so forth.

Great problems arise, though, when Christians are pressured into pleasing their neighbor's sinful desires. Great problems arise, though, when Christians are pressured into pleasing their neighbors through vocations that they are not called into. Not everyone is a minister. Not everyone is a trustee. Not everyone is a baker. Not everyone is a quilter. And that is okay!

To the point,

- 1) Disharmony transpires when we believe unity happens through similar cultural, sociological, and economic similarities rather than Christ.
- 2) Disharmony happens when we look to please ourselves and not our neighbor.
- 3) Disharmony occurs when we look to please our neighbor's sinful desires and not work to the good of their salvation.
- 4) Disharmony results when we do not work through our called vocations – when we attempt to get out of our lane into our neighbor's vocation.
- 5) However, when we see our unity in Christ, serving our neighbor through our vocations for the strengthening of their salvation? Well... there are unity and harmony! 😊

