

Romans 14:22-15:3

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Our Responsibilities Under Grace - Part 16

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

A great man once said to his congregation, "Now as you leave today, remember you are to witness to others and if need be, use words." What he was trying to say was, our witness is not in just what we say. Our witness is in how we live. It is one thing to understand grace. It is another thing to live up under its power. When a person is living under the power of grace in their life, they are living in the energy and the power of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is producing a love that Romans 12:9 says is without hypocrisy.

Now we come to Romans 14:22. We are going to talk about some things that I think are very, very important. It is one thing to get angry at legalism. It is another thing to get angry at a person who has been duped by legalism. In Galatians the Apostle Paul mocks and gets mad at legalism. Jesus did the same thing with the Pharisees, but not at the people. You see, you love the people. It is one thing to teach and be strong and be firm as to what grace is. It is another thing for you to treat a person who has not yet come to understand that with contempt. That is the whole point that Paul is making. Understanding grace is one thing. Living up under its power is another. When you live under its power, it gives you a divine sensitivity to those who are weaker in the faith around you.

There are three things we want to look at. First of all, the Apostle Paul addresses the fact of the individuality of living out of our own convictions. Each of us are responsible, whether strong or weak, to live out of our own conviction. Look at verse 22: "The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." Oh, what a verse.

First of all, he says, "The faith which you have." The word "faith" there is *pistis*, which comes from *pisteuo*, which means beliefs; that which you have been persuaded by as a result of God's Word. The word "have," *echo*, means that which you continually possess. So what is he talking about? He is saying those beliefs that you have that determine how you live, you have them as your own. You live in your own faith.

Remember the context here. I think what he is doing again is clarifying the fact that whether strong or weak, both are very sincere. Because you see, it says back in Romans 10:17 that faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God. You don't have convictions unless you are living in the Word of God, unless the Word of God is framing for you the grid by which you make your choices.

Some people can be moral but still not be on target for what God wants. You see, the mores of society, the folkways of society, can teach you morals. People can be ethically good in their minds, but still off-center when it comes to living righteously. Faith comes from hearing. Your convictions must come from the Word of God. Therefore, he says, you must live in your own convictions, not on somebody else's convictions, not off of what you heard, but from the Word of God. So whether strong or weak, you come to the Word of God and whatever you believe determines how you live. It must come from the Word of God.

He goes on to say, "have as your own conviction before God." Now that word "before" is *enopion*. It means not just before God, but in the sight of God. That takes a little bit different dimension than just being before God. Here is an individual, maybe a strong brother, maybe a weaker brother. It really doesn't matter. Their whole intent is to realize that they are in the sight of God whatever they do. Whatever they are doing, whether they are by themselves or whether they are with the group, they are always in the sight of God. And since they are in the sight of God, they want to make sure that what they are doing has been framed from what God has said. That is what Paul is talking about. So the weaker brother again is that sincere weaker brother.

Back in Romans 3:20 he uses that word "before" *enopion*. It says, "because by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight." There is the word *enopion*. It says in Romans 12:17, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men." Paul again is clarifying his audience. The stronger brother knows he lives in the presence of God. Nothing he does is outside of the presence of God and therefore, he is coming to the Word so that the Word might frame his convictions. The weaker brother is doing exactly the same thing.

Do you realize that the Word of God is the fountain from which flow the convictions that we live by? If you are not in the Word of God, then you are not living on the mark that God has for you. You are missing the mark in your life. You may be a good person and you may have framed your morals and your ethics by what society, as I said earlier, has dictated. That is not what Paul is talking about. Paul is talking about a person who has a sincere relationship with God, who knows he walks in His presence and, therefore, he wants to have all of his convictions framed with the Word of God.

Then Paul goes on in verse 22, "Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." Now I think they missed it in the translation, because the word "happy" comes from the word "hap" which means circumstance. It has to do with that which is around you, outside of you, that which is circumstantial, that which is very relative to the situation. But the word that is used here is *makarios*. It is also used in Matthew 5, and the same bad translation is used there, "happy is he who shows mercy."

No, the word *makarios* is an inside word. It has nothing to do with the outside. It has nothing to do with your circumstances, what makes you feel good or anything else. It means you are completely and wholly and fully spiritually satisfied inside, inwardly. Now, which one would you rather have, happy or *makarios*, which means inwardly you are spiritually satisfied, fully satisfied? Nothing else could bless you on the outside. You don't need anything on the outside. This is something God does on the inside of an individual's life.

"Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." Now what is he saying? He is saying here he has let the Word of God form a grid by which he has gotten his convictions. So, therefore, the choices that he makes during the week must line up with the convictions that have come from God's Word. A man who is living that way is not condemning himself. He is not a man who is going against his heart, who is going against the Spirit of God within him. He is living according to what God has shown him in His Word. Therefore, he is a man who is inwardly, spiritually, fully satisfied.

He may be a weaker brother. Now that is hard for us to grab hold of. He may not yet understand all that he has in Christ and all that grace means, but if he is honestly and sincerely working out of his own convictions and doing those things which his heart can approve and which meets the grid of what he has learned, that man is a fully satisfied individual, whether he is stronger or weaker in the faith. That is how we are all to live, in our own convictions and approve those things which matches those convictions.

Well, the contrast is in verse 23: "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin." Oh, if we could understand these words I think every one of us would get on our face before God and get in sackcloth and ashes and repent until Jesus comes back. Listen to what he says again: "But he who doubts is condemned if he

eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin." He is doubting. The word "doubts" there means he is in conflict with himself. In other words, it almost has the idea that there is a hesitation when it comes to doing this or that.

Here is an individual, maybe he is weak in the faith. He thinks you still have to eat vegetables. You can't eat meat. He comes along with a group, perhaps because of peer pressure or something else. Maybe somebody has treated him with contempt. Maybe somebody has made him feel like a fool, so therefore he decides, "I am going to eat that meat." But something inside him says, "Don't do it! Don't do it!" There is a hesitation that rises up because it is going against the grid of what he has learned from God's Word or what he has yet understood. But he goes ahead and does it anyway. The scripture says he condemns himself.

Do you want to be miserable in your life? Then don't get in the Word of God and don't frame your life by the convictions that come from His Word. That is the first way you can be miserable. The second way you will be miserable is, when you do have those convictions, you choose to live another way. You go against what your heart is telling you. That goes for eating or drinking, if you put that in any area of the Christian walk.

I honestly believe there are a lot of people who are psychologically and emotionally damaged because somewhere along the way they were seeking God in His Word, and God framed a lifestyle inside of them. But somewhere they chose to rationalize and go against what God had said, and now they are miserable and they don't know what to do. They are going from this counselor to that counselor to this person to that person and they don't realize the problem is within themselves. If they will come back to God, in His presence, get back into His Word and get back under that which is approved by His Word, the joy will come back and they will be spiritually, inwardly satisfied. But a person who goes against what his heart is telling him, what the conviction of God's Word has told him, is a person who is miserable.

Then Paul says, "and whatever is not from faith is sin." Now the word "sin" there is hamartia. If there was a target and I had a bow and arrow and I pulled that arrow back and I let that arrow go and missed the target, that is the word for sin. You see, there are a lot of people who morally and ethically are good people. But their convictions have nothing to do with the Word of God. It has to do with what they have learned through life. Certainly you do learn a lot of things. It has to do with integrity and with the kind of upbringing they had. Therefore, they have built their lifestyle based on that. But I want to tell you something: you can be good and moral and ethically right and still miss the mark of what God orders because faith only comes from hearing and hearing only from the Word of God.

I have said this for years, folks, if you are not under the authority of the Word of God, if you are not living your life according to the Word of God, you are not living by faith—period. They are good people, fine people, but their convictions are not convictions framed by God's Word. They don't live their life as if they are in the presence of God. They live doing whatever they think is socially acceptable. Therefore, what is right and wrong is their gauge rather than what is good and evil.

Do you know the difference? You see, a lot of parents think that they can raise their kids and train them as to what is right and wrong and when they grow up they will just go on and do it. They think right and wrong means that which mama and daddy wouldn't do and therefore you shouldn't do and that kind of thing. But I hate to tell you, but when they get out of high school and go to college, you know what happens. They get into that school and they find out what is right and wrong at home is not right and wrong at college. All of a sudden they are with a group of people who have come up with different conclusions. Mama and daddy are absolutely appalled when they find out that their son or daughter has completely changed the way they are living, but they still think that they are doing what is right and what is wrong. Why? Because it is flexible. It is fickle.

But what is good and evil comes based only on what God says and does not change, no matter where you are. It is the same. The Word of God never changes. It is the same today, tomorrow and forever. Now, are you going to build your kids based on convictions that come from the Word of God, or are you going to build your kids on what your grandmother did or didn't do and whatever you think is right inside? Walking by faith means you trust God, you trust His Word and you frame your lifestyle based on that. You approve the things that match that grid. If you don't do that, you are miserable, and if you are not living that way, you are not meeting the mark that God has for you. You are missing the mark.

No wonder you are missing the mark. Come back to Him. Come back to His Word, Romans 12:1-2, and you will find the joy you have been looking for. You can't find it outside of that. It is amazing to me how all these chapters keep coming back to the well of Romans 12:1-2.

This thought of the weaker and the stronger carries into chapter 15. Remember the weaker brother is seeking the Lord just like you are. He is in the Word. He is in the presence of God. He is sincere. He doesn't understand grace while you understand grace. But both of you are to live under the convictions that you have of your own. You are not to wear somebody else's convictions on your sleeve. But they are to be your own convictions out of faith seeking Him.

Well, secondly, not only do we see the individuality of living out of our own convictions, but we also see the responsibility now that comes along with the strong in the faith towards the weaker brother. What is the responsibility that Paul brings out? Chapter 15,

verse 1: "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves." Now there is a give and take here, and the person who is going to have to do the giving is not the weaker brother. It is going to have to be the stronger brother.

I will be honest with you, I don't really like this. I mean, it goes against the grain of my flesh. I don't like that. Why is it that I understand what grace is and I have to give in to the weaker brother, even at times change my own behavior, so that I don't become a stumbling block to him? Well, it is because God says that is what I am to do. The strong, here again, refers to the strong in the faith: "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength." The word for "strong" is the word *dunatos*. That word has the idea of the ability that you have as a result of something. We are strong because we understand grace.

What is the ability we have that a person without this ability does not have? We have the ability to make rational decisions based on the message of grace, the message of who we are in Christ, of whose we are in Christ, the message of our eternal standing with the Father in Christ Jesus. We have that ability. We can make those choices. But a weaker brother in the faith cannot because he doesn't understand his standing with the Father through Jesus Christ His Son.

The word "ought" is *opheilo*. We have seen that word before in Romans 13:8: "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another." It is the word for "owe." We have to understand that if we understand grace, we didn't figure it out. God must have revealed it to us. So therefore, if He has revealed it to us, now we are indebted to the weaker brother to bear up under his weaknesses. That is incredible to me. It is kind of like the Apostle Paul who said, "I am indebted to the Romans, to the Greeks, to the barbarians. I am indebted to teach this message of grace because of what God has shown me." He was a legalistic Jew. He knew nothing about grace. Now he feels the debt that has been put upon him. He owes a debt to the weaker in the faith to help them understand what the message of grace is all about.

What is that debt? "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength." The word for "bear" is *bastazo*. It is used in Romans 11:18: "do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you." The word for "supports" is the same word for "bear"—*bastazo*. It has the idea of getting up under something, of actually being a life support. It has the idea of understanding, of toleration. We, the stronger, who understand the message of who and whose we are in Christ, of what we have in Him and that nothing can deter that relationship with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ, we are now the life source to those who are weak in the faith. We have become a foundation, a basis, that which they rest upon. It carries the idea of toleration and understanding those weaknesses.

Now what are their weaknesses? The word for "weakness" has the little word *ma* at the end, which always means the result of a weakness. So what are their weaknesses? In the context, they think you can only eat vegetables. They think you have a certain day in the week when you worship God, and there are no other days that you can do it. They still have not understood the message of God's grace. Therefore, we who understand differently have to tolerate that, understand that, make adjustments to that. You see, we become the support life system to the people in their weaknesses, not just the fact that they are weak but in the actual weaknesses.

It goes on to say, "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength." The word "without strength" is *adunatos*. It is the same word we had for strong, put with an "a" in front of it, so it means without any of this ability. They don't have the ability to see it like we see it. They are going to see it the way they are going to see it. They are sincere. They are not sinful or stubborn. They came to their conclusions from the Word of God, but they just can't get a handle on it.

Therefore, we are to make the concession, not them, which means we are going to have to do some restraining in the way we live. We are going to have to pull back on some of the privileges that we have in Christ because we don't want to become a stumbling block to that person in the midst of their weaknesses. Now, I don't know why it is that way, but that is what the Word of God says. The stronger always makes the concession for the weaker.

In Chapter 15, verse 1 it says, "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves." The last part tells you the real practical understanding. We are not to please ourselves. It is also translated "accommodate ourselves." We don't listen to our flesh.

I want to tell you something, folks. If you want to talk about tribulation and adversity and pressure, there is nothing like understanding grace, but having to give in to somebody who doesn't understand it. That's when your flesh will just defeat you. Do you know what my flesh wants to do? Just be arrogant. "If those people want to think that way, then let them think that way! Man, I am under grace." I have to die to that rotten flesh that has that idea. I have to let the Holy Spirit of God produce in me a divine sensitivity to my brother that I would not take my strength and become a stumbling block to him who is weak.

I have to be conscious of the fact that somebody could be offended by my actions. Now I can't walk around and be paranoid, because everything you do is going to offend somebody. But when the Holy Spirit of God puts it on your heart that you have

offended a brother, then you have to deal with your flesh, make the concession, die to that which you know has nothing to do with your standing with God in Christ Jesus in order that whatever that is would not become a stumbling block to that brother.

I want you to know, this is hard, because I have people near and dear to me that do not understand grace yet. God is saying to me, "There may be some things you are doing right now out of your flesh that you need to change because the stronger brother must make the concession and not do anything to please yourself, not to accommodate yourself." Don't forget Romans 12:1-2. Our whole attitude now is enabled by the faith that Christ's Holy Spirit lives in us and produces this kind of divine sensitivity when we are willing to die to self and let Him be the Lord of our life.

Romans 15:2 says, "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification." Now this really puts meat to the whole thing. He said, "Let each of us please his neighbor. Don't accommodate yourself, accommodate him. You make the concession to him. You are the support now to him and you make the concession." Paul says, "for his good." The word is *agathos*, and that means that which is spiritually beneficial to your neighbor. In other words, whatever God leads you to do, you be willing to do it if it will bring a spiritual benefit to that person's life.

It goes on to say, "to his edification." The word "edification" is *oikodome*. It means to build a house. Paul is saying, "Whatever you do, whatever concession you make, you have the attitude of being willing to listen to the Holy Spirit in the sensitivity of that moment to die to yourself so that whatever you do is building him up in the faith." That means that you encourage him, you instruct him, you teach him the Word. You pray for him. If your lifestyle is somehow standing in front of all of that, then you are going to have to die to that in order that your brother might come to an understanding of what grace is all about.

Well, we see first of all the individuality. We see secondly the responsibility that the stronger has. But then thirdly we see the integrity of the command that God has given through Paul. There is a lot of integrity in this, a lot of feasibility, a lot of reasonability there. Look at what Paul does in Romans 15:3-4: "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell upon Me.' For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

You have got to remember the flow of Romans. Way back in chapter 6 we learned that the Spirit of God, the life of God, has been permeated us. "Do you mean the very life of Christ is in me as a believer?" Right. Now, if that is possible and I am living surrendered to Him which taps into that life, Romans 12:1-2, then the very heart of Christ begins to operate within me and I am now accommodating Him and He will accommodate the need of the person that I am ministering to. He will keep me from accommodating my flesh.

So Paul says, "Let's go back to Christ who now lives in us." How did He live? He did not please Himself. He quotes out of Psalms 69:9. It says, "For zeal for Thy house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach Thee have fallen on me."

The word for "reproach" there means "that which was said evil against you, Father, has now fallen upon me." The whole picture is a prophecy of Christ and the fact that He was the inherently righteous one. They were the ones who were wrong and did not understand. They reproached the Father and the reproaches of all that fell on Him. It doesn't look like it is fair, does it? But when you are the stronger, you always make the greatest concession. It was not the disciples who went to the cross, it was Jesus. The stronger always makes the heaviest concession when it comes to the weaker. We have a responsibility. But we also have an enabling power within us, the Holy Spirit. Christ Himself gives us the divine love that enables us to be able to concede to the one around us who is weak in the faith.

Paul is simply saying esteem that weaker brother as higher than yourself. Turn to Philippians 2:3-5. I just want you to see this and remember what is going on at that time. Paul is in prison. He has been there almost five years and look at what he says 3. He is writing to the church at Philippi, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind." That word means that attitude I have towards myself in light of who I know God is. He goes on in the verse, "let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others."

Look at verse 5: "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." Somebody may say, "But we are not God. We can't have that attitude." Now wait a minute. You are not God, that is right. There are those two absolutes: 1) there is a God and 2) you are not Him. But God is in you, you see.

In Philippians 1, Christ is his life. In Chapter 2, therefore Christ can be his attitude and can enable him to esteem the weaker brother as more important than himself. You can write it down, when you find yourself unable to do that, it is because you are no longer living as if in His presence and you are no longer living according to the convictions God's Word has given to you. You have chosen to accommodate your flesh and in doing that, you have rediscovered the inability of what flesh cannot do. It cannot do it, but God in you can do it and will make you that sensitive to others.

Many times we have heard the message of Philippians 2:6-9 preached, but how many times have we heard it in context? The

context is, you have the same attitude Christ had when He emptied Himself of His glory, came to this earth and paid the supreme price to heal a broken relationship between man and God. You have this same attitude in you that Christ had when He did that. Therefore, if Christ is in me, and He is, He is enabling me. You have to continue to keep this together or you will end up the most frustrated individual in Chattanooga.

Well, in Romans 15:4 he takes them back to the Old Testament and shows them something. He says, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

"Now, wait a minute. Hold on. I am confused. I thought I already had hope." Well, you do, but you don't. It is kind of like your whole perspective changes when you are living like God wants you to live. Now think with me for a second. If I am living accommodating my flesh, I am not living in Romans 12:1-2, so I am not looking forward to His coming, the hope of His coming. I am only looking forward to what I can get out of today and maybe tomorrow, or out of you or somebody else. That is my flesh. But when I start dying to flesh, then all of a sudden that which is around me that I can see, touch and feel, fades in comparison to the hope that He is coming one day for His church. The people who look and long for His coming are the ones He loves. They love His coming, His appearing. But if I am loving myself, I don't love the appearing of Christ.

As a matter of fact, every time we talk about the fact we will stand before Christ one day and be judged according to our deeds, many people get fearful. I want to tell you why. Because you are not living for Him now. You live for your flesh, accommodate your flesh. The hope of His coming is not an exciting thing to you. If Christ comes tomorrow, look at what you will lose that you have invested into this world. But if you turn that thing around, invest in Him and die to your old flesh, then if He comes tomorrow that is what you are looking for. That hope is born out of dealing with difficult situations to where you have to die to the wickedness of your flesh.

Go back to Romans 5. I want to show you something. He is building off of this in Romans 15. He says in Romans 5:3-4, "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations." You think it is not a tribulation when you have to die to yourself and your understanding of grace to a weaker brother who doesn't understand that and you have to eat vegetables in his presence if that is what it takes to reach him. "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance [the ability to bear up under], and perseverance, proven character [it will show who you are], and proven character, hope." It is born out of that.

We talk about tribulation, people persecuting you and all this kind of stuff. Folks, one of the biggest pressurized situations we are going to be in is when we understand grace and we have to die to that in order to be sensitive to a weaker brother who doesn't understand it. That is the hardest thing I think I have ever had to do. There are times when the Holy Spirit of God says, "Wayne, say this," and I say it, hopefully. Sometimes I don't. There are other times when the Holy Spirit will say, "Wayne, shut your mouth." "But Lord, I..." "Shut your mouth. Don't utter a word." Why would He do that? Because He knows if I say anything, that will immediately defeat the one I am trying to reach. There are times when God says, "Wayne, go ahead. Do whatever you are doing. Go on." There will be other times the Spirit will say, "Don't you dare." Lord? "Don't you dare." Why? The Holy Spirit knows there is somebody that will be offended. I don't know that sometimes, but the Holy Spirit does.

So it all comes back. You don't go home and get real paranoid and say, "Golly, everything I am doing is offending somebody." You will just go build yourself a room somewhere and die one day without ever seeing another person. That is not what he is talking about. Let the Holy Spirit orchestrate this thing. If you tie it back to Romans 12:1-2 it makes all the sense in the world. If you dislocate it, it doesn't make any sense. But as you tie it to that then the Holy Spirit of God will give you a divine sensitivity.

Now there are other people who come to these same conclusions, but they don't operate out of the sensitivity of the Spirit. They are over here trying to blanket every situation that way. No, that is not what you are talking about. The stronger in the faith understand what I am saying. You live in that relationship, and He will dictate as you walk. When you restrain, when you encourage, when you refrain, when you instruct, He will give you that sensitivity. But it is God being God in you. "Jesus be Jesus in me. No longer me, but Thee. Resurrection power, fill me this hour, Jesus, just be Jesus in me."

I tell you what, there have been more people lost for the cause of Christ because somebody who understood took it and crammed it down somebody else's throat who didn't understand and destroyed the work of God in that person's life because of their arrogance for what they think they have concluded. We didn't conclude anything, folks. It was revealed to our hearts. And understanding it is part of it. Living under its power is the other part. It dictates the way we live. If necessary, sometimes we have to use words, but our witness is the way we live amongst others, the weaker especially.