

PLEASING OUR NEIGHBOR

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” (Romans 15:1-3 KJV)

Someone has defined sin as: “I want, what I want, when I want it”. Another has quipped that the most popular religion in the world is man’s worship of himself. Lucifer, the original sinner, said in his heart: **“I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the most High” (Is. 14:13, 14).**

Jesus, by contrast, made Himself of no reputation and took the form of a servant and we are to have the mind of Jesus (Phil. 2:5 - 7). While this concept is a radical departure from worldly thinking, it is the very essence of Christianity. Jesus did not please Himself, and we are not to please ourselves. Our text is explicit, Jesus did not please Himself! His prayer to God was: “Not my will but Thine be done”. How simple! How profound! When we have the mind of Christ we too will not please ourselves but please our neighbor for his good unto his edification.

There is an old illustration that made the rounds a half century ago. It seems that guests were invited to a sumptuous banquet, but were required to eat with spoons that were three feet long. One room was filled with angry people trying to feed themselves but the other room was filled with happy people feeding one another. The point of the parable is obvious.

Motivational speakers sometimes encourage their students to place pictures on the wall to remind them of their goals in life. If, for example, your goal is to own a new Cadillac, then that picture becomes a constant reminder of your goal. The goal of Christ was to please others and we should have the same goal that He did. Remarkably, that dreaded cross brought Him joy (Heb. 12:2). Paul wrote to the Ephesians that we are to work hard with our hands so that we can give to those in need (Eph. 4:28).

It is important at this point to filter our benevolence through the lens of love. To love our neighbor, as you know, is to fulfill the law (Rom. 13:8). We do not turn the other cheek when our own child chooses to strike us. Our love for the child requires discipline. We do not give money to an addict who is planning to buy drugs. True love requires a different approach. It may be convenient to give a dollar to a beggar to get rid of him, but love requires a different course of action. In 1964 President Johnson declared a war on poverty and during the next 50 years gave 22 trillion dollars to the poor. Today a significant number of poor people are in greater need than they were 50 years ago.

One of the most difficult commandments in the Bible is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matt. 7:12). The next verse, Matt. 7:13, commands us to enter into the strait gate and the narrow way. What God hath joined together, man should not put asunder. Please consider that the strait gate and the narrow way is loving our neighbor. The Law forbade adultery, but love forbids lust. The Law required an eye for an eye, but love does not retaliate. When the Law requires you to surrender your coat, love is even more demanding. When your goal is to please your neighbor you are committing yourself to a strait gate and a narrow way. Only a few will find it! When a certain lawyer wanted to justify himself, he asked Jesus “And who is my neighbor?” (Lk. 10:29). That’s when Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan. When we see someone in need that’s when we need to run the risk of getting involved. Jesus did! So should we!