

Introduction for June 6, 2010

Paul wrestled with issues at Rome that could have wrecked the church. Those very issues remind us of the complexity and the depth of the process of sanctification. How the church navigates through the waters of trouble and moves through the tension between living in the world but not of the world speaks much about her maturity and understanding of the gospel. The imperatives that Paul employed in Romans 13-15 direct our hearts and minds to how we must love each other and keep us humble because the task is not easy. Paul's list of imperatives to the church at Rome raises many questions and challenges us at the very level of our growth in grace. If meat, drink and the observance of days were issues for the church in the 1st century think of the multiple layers that have been added over the last 20 centuries. In our day, relativism, pluralism and pragmatism have raised questions that seem to indicate that no one really cares what the church does or says any more. When same sex marriage is the dominant conversation in many mainline denominations and the gospel has been emasculated of its authority, power and majesty, what's the point? Is it even relevant to talk about biblical things and imperatives? Should we just not all try to get along and not be so concerned about truth, or at least biblical truth? If we can redefine all of the church's terminology to fit our social, political and economic agendas, then surely that is all that is necessary. Doctrine doesn't really matter for god is whoever we want him to be. Why was Paul so adamant about doctrine and living holy before God? Why was he so concerned about a love that fulfills the law? Surely no one believes that what happened at Mount Sinai is important for today? And this stuff about the cross and resurrection of Christ can't be real! So, why all the fuss over doctrine and renewing our minds and growing in grace and living in the cross? Do we really even need the church in this day?

How important was this to Paul? Well, he gave his life for the gospel, for he knew that the only hope for the church was the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ for both saint and sinner. He knew that Christ was Lord, not Caesar. He knew that doctrine mattered and thus his theological treatise in Romans 1-11 which in fact is the heart of the gospel. So, without it, there is no truth, no life, no hope, no love, no joy, no peace, no reality. His arguments in 12-15 are

necessary for the church's growth in grace and the process of sanctification. These are not trivial pursuits, but the passionate pursuit of God in order to be found pleasing to Him and to know the surpassing value of King Jesus above all else. Paul's gospel was the gospel of Jesus. There is no difference. The indicatives that speak of the work of God summed up in Christ lay the foundation for the imperatives for loving each other. How we think, feel, speak, act and live does matter and has eternal consequences. What we believe about the gospel dictates how we behave with the gospel. The wrestling with our sin and the constancy of repentance is quite necessary if we are to grow into the full measure of the stature of Christ and make progress on our way to heaven along the road of sanctification. To wrestle with the truths of Romans 13-15 is so critical to our standing firm in this day of mealy mouthed, wishy-washy Christianity. As Thomas Watson said, "A broken heart and a broken Christ do well agree. The more bitterness we taste in sin, the more sweetness we shall taste in Christ."

I encourage you to wrestle with these texts and see what God does to your heart. If you long to be mature in Christ, then walk this path with Paul and hear the Word of God that will indict, convict, change, encourage and cause you to endure to the end. The sweetness of obedience will lead to the sureness of our knowing that we stand complete in Christ.