



ROMANS Part 128

Chapter 15:1-4

The new pleasure of
pleasing others.



1 Now we, the able, ought to be bearing the infirmities of the impotent, and not to be pleasing ourselves. Let each of us please his associate, for his good, toward his edification. 3 For Christ also pleases not Himself, but according as it is written, “The reproaches of those reproaching Thee fall on Me.” 4 For whatever was written before, was written for this teaching of ours, that through the endurance and the consolation of the Scriptures we may have expectation.

This passage hardly needs commented upon. In fact, it needs no comment at all. Not from me anyway. This is the first passage from Romans that I’ve gazed upon (gazed longingly upon), with no words to show for it, since this series began on October 5, 2013. As I look at the calendar today, I see that this series is now four years old. It ought to be reaching its hand into cookie jars by now, and I suppose that it is. It is a well-trained series, however; I have not had to send it to its room one time.

So the words of Paul here are mysteriously speaking for themselves and I feel idled. Here I sit on the sidelines; how was I supposed to know that Paul, for once, would make such sense with such plain, understandable words? I suppose, for the sake of the fourth birthday of this series, that I ought to give it a try and write *something*. (I think it would bother me too much to me to write a single paragraph—this one—and walk off—though I’m willing to do it if necessary.) I feel that whatever words I *can* possibly muster cannot help but drag their feet (the substance of them, that is), but perchance I can sprinkle fairy dust on the *style* side of things and, by some happy accident, extract a truth.

AGILE, NOT FRAGILE

Paul calls the weak of faith “impotent.” I believe that the same word was used by Peter to describe the lame man

that he healed by the gate called Beautiful. Yes, I believe the poor man was “impotent in the feet.” A very kind way of saying, “Cripple.” The people said, “Here comes that cripple!” and Peter said, “Have a heart, will you? He is not a cripple, but he is merely impotent in the feet.”

No one had ever said a nicer thing about that cripple.

Those who are obsessively squeamish about the many things that they can’t do in Christ—about all the different ways that they can disappoint Jesus (ways that not even Jesus has thought of)—are basically crippled in the faith. They’re impotent in the feet. They can’t walk in freedom because to walk is to risk. (You’ll certainly not see them *running* anytime soon.) All they see is potential pitfalls; thus, they never leave the “house.” They imagine that, if they but look askance at Him, God will pull the rug out from under them. They’re like those who buy a new house but don’t ever really *live* in the house because it’s *so* new (and beautiful and orderly) that the buyers cover the furniture with plastic shrouds and force people to remove their shoes at the door. The house is basically the Louvre (“No photos, please!”), and the *people* don’t live—the house does. The people merely caretake the house.

As if Jesus Christ needs dusted. As if He needs lemon Pledge applied around His edges. As if our little misdeemeanors will soil His oriental rugs. As if we can’t sit down

on Him (yes, *on* Him) and muddy His floors and stain His upholstery. (As though this would lessen His value.) As though He follows us around with a rag, a squeegee, and a two-liter jug of Mr. Clean: “Be *careful*! I just *mopped* this!”

This is not Him. It is not the way of His house. The house that is the body of Christ is to be lived in, sat upon, run through. We are to at least walk briskly. Do not tiptoe. Jesus requires no one to remove their shoes or “Be careful of the Native American pottery on the fourteenth century Italian table.” This is not a museum. There are no velvet ropes or armed guards here. The butler won’t follow you around with a dustpan. Here, in the body of Christ, one can let down *all* of one’s guards. Jesus Christ wants His sons and daughters relaxing in His presence. He doesn’t care if His offspring eat in the living room. This is why He named it a “living room.” It is a place for the living. Those about to be dying belong at a funeral home.

MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME

“The spirit of God makes its home in us.” These are the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:16. If the spirit of God makes its home in us, then shouldn’t we make our home in *it*? Are we neater and cleaner than the spirit of God? Are we holier than the holy spirit? Are you telling me that the spirit of God makes its home in us, but we follow the spirit of God around with a bottle of Murphy oil soap? With a damp floor mop? How pleased would God and Christ be with us treating their *living* place like this? It’s insulting to them. And if the holy spirit were actually the third person of a mythical Trinity instead of the power by which God operates, would it not say, from the sofa, “Hand me that box of Oreos.”

Jesus Christ is not so fragile. The holy spirit (the power of God) is not so fragile. It occupies a home, not a house. (“The spirit of God makes its *home* in you.”) We will not wreck it by living in it. We can only wreck it, really, by imagining that it is within our power to preserve it. We can only wreck it by insisting that we remove our shoes in it while shrouding the furniture in plastic. We can only wreck it by sitting overly careful in it with the same verve and energy as wax figures at Madame Tussauds.

CHRIST’S NEW PLEASURE

For Christ also pleases not Himself, but according as it is written, “The reproaches of those reproaching Thee fall on Me.”





Christ did not live to please Himself, but rather the One Who sent Him. He did this to the extent that He bore the reproaches that human beings would have leveled against God (the One Who sent Christ), were God ever to show up. (Haters of God hated Christ in His stead.) However, it pleased Christ to bear this reproach for the sake of His Father and to take away not only this sin, but all sin.

It pleased Jesus Christ to do His Father's will. So He was actually pleased by not pleasing Himself. Pleasing Himself would not have pleased Him as much as pleasing Another, namely His Father. (Pay attention, if you please; this is important.) It would have been pleasing to Christ to please Himself, yes, but not as pleasing as *not* pleasing Himself, since the sacrificing of Himself, in fact, brought Him more pleasure. Christ lived to be pleased (as we all do; Jesus Christ was a human being), but He learned a new pleasure, which I choose to call: not pleasing Himself. He learned that the thing that pleased Him the most was pleasing Someone Else.

It has pleased me to tell you all this.

I'm not saying that Christ did not sacrifice. He did. He sacrificed for His Father and for us. Again, it's not like He never enjoyed Himself. Someone who is never happy, in any way, cannot survive long upon this planet, and I think this includes Christ. If Jesus Christ lived to please Himself, He would have had *some* degree of pleasure (yes, of course, I'm not saying that He wouldn't or shouldn't), but nothing like that degree found in pleasing the objects of His affection. Thus, He found new and perhaps unexpected realms of happiness by caring for others here on Earth and taking hits for God.

"PLEASED TO PLEASE YOU"

I contend that we can enter into the same happiness as our Lord by giving up some freedoms, temporarily, for the sake of others. We can do it, for example, by abstaining from wine in the presence of one who imagines the drinking of it to be sin. Let's explore this particular avenue.

Now, I know how enjoyable it is to drink wine—especially dry reds. It’s fun to feel the alcohol moving cell by cell through the bloodstream, turning parts of the blood into fermented grape juice. As the juice has its way, one suddenly does not worry as much as one did before unscrewing the cork. As the elixir finds its mark, one suddenly finds oneself laughing a good bit more than one did before twisting the foil cutter—even at things that aren’t really funny. Suddenly, one finds oneself saying more clever things than one said before the tipping of the odd-shaped glass. However, consider the following.

It may be even be *more* pleasurable (try it and see; I know it to be the case) to know that, while every bottle of wine in the world happily awaits one’s leisure and capillary system, there is a greater enjoyment to be had. By the power of God and the love of Christ, one can decide to forgo the pleasure of such a thing as wine for the sake a weaker brother or sister who would stumble at the partaking of it. This, my fellow believers, is an intoxicant better than the one that has been under discussion.

Try it. It’s one of the most intoxicating elixirs to be poured. It’s exhilarating freedom knowing that one can have everything and yet choose, temporarily, to have nothing—for the sake of weaker members of the body



of Christ. Refusing the acceptable thing can make one feel so fine, so spiritual, so transcendently generous that the finest Bourgogne Chardonnay (I’m thinking of the 2006 bottling made by the Nicolas Potel stable from hand-picked grapes grown in and around the village of Meursault) cannot compare.

And so now you know *my* dirty little secret: I actually receive more pleasure *not* drinking wine than drinking it in the face of someone for whom it’s a sin. Such pleasure can only come by knowing that I *can* drink it and

that, in fact, Jesus Christ Himself would gladly tip a glass with me should we could step outside beyond eyeshot of the squeamish believer. The sacrifice would be no fun at all—in fact it would be impossible to enjoy—were the wine prohibited. It is only the allowance of a thing that animates the sacrifice of it. For what good is there in resisting the prohibited thing? Such would only be a burden. But resisting the rich, the dark, the fruity and the fun—ahh, now that is a kick to the bloodstream that not even fermentation can produce.

THAT GOOD BOOK

For whatever was written before, was written for this teaching of ours, that through the endurance and the consolation of the Scriptures we may have expectation (Romans 15:4).

God wrote the whole of Scripture for our instruction. It’s not all written *to* us, but the entire Catalog is *for* us. Not a single unimportant detail wrecks The Book. There is a reason why God wanted us to know that Paul and Barnabas fought bitterly over whether or not to take Barnabas’ nephew Mark on that second missionary journey; now we know that *we’re* allowed to fight bitterly, if necessary. There is a reason why God wanted us to know that Paul called withstanders of truth, “Enemies of righteousness,” “Idlebellies,” and “Sons of the Adversary”; if we are not using these colorful terms to describe *our* adversaries, we’re missing out on becoming imitators of Paul. There is a reason why God told us that Jesus “passed the cup” among His disciples; the cup was not filled with chocolate milk. Jesus, of course, drank wine. The last I heard, He turned lots of water into wine at a wedding. If it’s good enough for Jesus, it ought to be good enough for us.

There is a reason why God wanted us to know that Jesus Christ chose one lame man to heal at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15) and—for the time being—left many other cripples stalled upon their mats. If we can gently nudge a cripple-faithed person to freedom, then we ought to do it. Let us set an example of freedom and heal them. But to those “crippled in the feet” who yet feel at home upon their haunches—for now, let them go. Cater to their calamity. Love them through it. Render them a new underarm pad for their crutch; refresh their mats of straw.

But for God’s sake, do not pour them a drink. —MZ

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email: mzennder@martinzender.com