

Text: Romans 15:1-6

Title: “It’s All About Me”

INTRODUCTION

Today I’m bringing to a close this series of messages I’ve entitled “Hazmat ... The Most Dangerous Ideas in Your Culture.” This hazardous material comes in the form of ideas, thoughts and philosophies that make up a person’s worldview. And that worldview shapes our attitudes and our actions.

For example, if my worldview includes the existence of the One True God, I understand that He is the source of everything and I praise and thank Him.

Psalm 103:1-2 - Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

Benefits mean that there is a Benefactor to whom I am grateful. So gratitude flows out of our worldview that God exists and He blesses us.

On the other hand, ingratitude also flows from a worldview that leaves God out of the picture. If I don’t believe in a Benefactor who benefits human beings, then the result is ingratitude. This is what the Bible is talking about when it describes people who deny the truth that God exists in spite of the fact that God has made it plain to them:

Romans 1:20 - For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Romans 1:21 - For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

So if we ignore the existence of the One True God who takes care of His creatures and blesses them, we will certainly not be grateful to Him and depend upon Him. Instead life becomes one long quest to satisfy my own needs and to make myself happy. In other words, it’s all about me. I’m entitled to be happy, and so everyone else exists to make that happen. And from a biblical standpoint, that is a hazardous idea that has permeated our culture.

ILLUSTRATION - I have an idea that the election that took place a couple weeks ago is a reflection of this very issue. And many people, while they were marking a ballot for one candidate or another, were really, in essence, voting for the candidate named “me.” Their vote was a reflection of their belief that the world revolves around me, and I will vote for people who will do the most for “me,” not necessarily who will do the most for the nation as a whole.

Now we are about to enter the Christmas season and it’s about to get crazy. I can tell you this ... one hazardous thought is the thought that you want to go to WalMart or Target on Black Friday. That could be hazardous to your health ... and your bank account.

ILLUSTRATION – Four years ago the police had to be called the Wal-Mart in Valley Stream NY where a huge crowd had gathered in the parking lot at 3a.m. on Black Friday waiting for the store to open at 5 a.m. The crowd was getting out of control. As they crowd grew they pressed against the front door of the store. Soon the crowd couldn't be held back and the door gave way. The frenzied mob surged into the store in search of limited quantities of bargain big-screen TVs and toys. A Wal-Mart worker was standing just inside the sliding glass door when this happened. The crowd rolled right over him. He was knocked to the floor and literally trampled to death by the people racing into the store. But the savage behavior didn't stop there. When the shoppers were informed that the store would need to be cleared because of the death of an employee, many of them continued to shop, yelling that they had been waiting in line since the day before and they were not going to leave.

It's all about me. And this selfish attitude can be found in many families. It happens when a husband thinks that his wife's main role in life is to meet his every need. It happens when a wife thinks only of herself and not the needs of her husband. It happens when children think the world revolves around them.

It's all about me. That attitude even shows up in churches. Open your Bibles to Romans 15:1. Romans contains the most extensive explanation of the Gospel in all the Bible. Scholars believe that this partly due to the fact that the Apostle Paul intended to make the church in Rome his headquarters for the spreading of the Gospel to places it had never been before. And he wanted to make sure they understood the Gospel. If they didn't it could potentially negate the impact the Gospel would have. And Paul takes the first eleven chapters to instruct them in the Gospel. But then the remaining chapters (Chs.12-16) have to do, not with *believing* the Gospel, but with *behaving* the Gospel.

What could potentially negate the impact of the Gospel is disunity in the church, and people thinking that it's all about me. There was a potentially hazardous divide between Jews and Gentiles ... an "us" vs. "them" mentality. And so Paul exhorts them. Read Romans 15:1-6.

There's a section of Romans that includes Romans 14-15 where Paul zeroes in on this matter of judging others whose walk with Christ is different from our own. He's not talking about primary theological and doctrinal understandings, nor is he talking about living out a holy and righteous life from a moral perspective. There's no compromise in those matters. Rather Paul writes about matters that are debatable, particularly when it comes to what is permissible and not permissible in terms of food that should or should not be eaten, or disciplines that should or should not be observed. It was about when or how people should worship.

And there were people whom Paul calls the "strong" and the "weak" ... those who are mature in their faith, and those who are less mature ... those who understand freedom in Christ and those who still struggle with doing certain things.

And disunity had crept into the church because people thought, "It's all about me ... about how I see things and how I want to do things. And Romans 14-15 speaks to this very issue. It's not about me; it's about doing what is best and edifying for my brothers and sisters in Christ.

ILLUSTRATION – Rick Warren’s bestselling book *The Purpose-Driven Life* begins with the words, “It’s not about you.”

So let’s see how Paul approaches this. First there’s something about:

1. OUR OBLIGATION (Romans 15:1)

Romans 15:1 - We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

So if you think you are strong, that is that you understand things and are mature, great. But you have a higher obligation. The word “ought” means there’s an obligation here for a Christ-follower. You have an obligation to do two things:

- **Bear with the failings of the weak**

“Bear” means “to bear up under a burden.” You could do things that are pleasing to you, but instead you set aside your preferences for the benefit of others.

- **Not to please yourself**

In other words, you have an obligation to set aside what makes you happy and what makes you feel good for the sake of the needs of others.

This is what Paul was talking about earlier in this section:

Romans 14:3 - The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.

Romans 14:4 - Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

So there’s something here about our obligation, but also about:

2. OUR CONSIDERATION (Romans 15:2)

Romans 15:2 - Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

“build him up” = to strengthen or to make someone more able. That has to be our primary consideration in our relationships at church and in our families ... to consider what helps others and builds them up. Again, earlier in this section Paul said:

Romans 14:19 - Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

It's not just about what makes me happy and makes me feel good.

Philippians 2:3 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Philippians 2:4 - Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

This morning we are ordaining two new deacons. And this is at the heart of the service of a deacon. But it is at the heart of our ministry to one another within the church. It's not about me.

Next, there's something about...

3. OUR MOTIVATION (Romans 15:3)

What is it that drives this attitude within us? Our motivation is to be like our Lord ... to follow His example in all matters. And this is the example that Jesus lived out before us.

Romans 15:3 - For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

If Christ had come to please Himself he would have not put up with the insults of others ... He would have not endured the shame and suffering of the Cross. But no, He was focused on doing His Father's will in dying for our sins so that we might be forgiven.

Philippians 2:5 - Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Philippians 2:6 - Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

Philippians 2:7 - but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And then next there is something about...

4. OUR INSPIRATION (Romans 15:4-5)

What inspires us and empowers us to live this way toward others. It is the hope we have that comes through the endurance and encouragement God gives us.

Now Paul has just quoted a Messianic Psalm in Psalm 69. So he says that...

Romans 15:4 - For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Now the only way that you and I can be inspired live not to just please ourselves but to build others up is that we need endurance and encouragement. And where does that come from? God gives it to us through Scripture. As we read God shows us how to endure the weaknesses of others and how to be encouraged.

To live this way in relation to other people requires us to have two things:

- Endurance = the ability to bear up under a circumstance. It's the opposite of saying, "I can't stand this or that."
- Encouragement = actively encouraging and consoling others

And these two qualities give us hope, which is our inspiration.

Knowing that this endurance and encouragement is found in the promises of Scripture, Paul then offers a prayer:

Romans 15:5 - May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,

For the last year, this has been the primary prayer I have been praying for our church. God in His grace gives us the endurance and encouragement to bear with one another and to seek to build one another up, not to judge. And this God who gives endurance and encouragement can give us a spirit of unity among ourselves. That unity means to be in harmony and to think the same way.

And this happens as we follow Christ Jesus. The antidote to the hazardous material of selfishness is the attitude of Jesus Christ. And then there is something here about...

5. OUR MISSION (Romans 15:6)

Romans 15:6 - so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The little conjunction that begins this verse points to purpose ... "so that..." The purpose behind this unity is that we might carry out the mission that has been given us. Our mission, our purpose, is with "one heart and mouth" to glorify God.

So it isn't just "it's not about *me*." It's not about *us*. We exist to bring glory to God by carrying out His mission for us. It's easy for churches to slip into the mentality that we exist for us ... for what makes us happy and what makes us feel good. No, we exist to bring glory to God with our hearts and our lips.

We cannot look at our new building as clubhouse for our church. We must see it as a lighthouse ... a hospital.

Jesus in His great prayer in John 17 prayed this very thing for us:

John 17:23 - I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

It's not about me. It's not about us. It's about Him!