

Broad Shoulders

Romans 15:1-3

Love is no commodity that comes down from heaven waiting to be unwrapped. No – it is actively exercising patience with others and the circumstances God has purposed. It is being able to take the long view, knowing that nothing can happen to us without the will of our heavenly Father. Love acts and reacts without irritation because life isn't fair, without blaming others for what we are experiencing, and without planning how we'll get even.

This quote from “Love Came Down at Christmas,” by Sinclair Ferguson is surely based on the words of Paul:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails... (1 Cor 13:4-8 NKJ)

This is the backbone of our three verses of which begin Romans 15. The strong are to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not please themselves.

On the one hand, this forbids what you see everywhere in the world – the abuse of power, position and privilege in order to crush the weak. That is people doing what pleases their flesh.

On the other hand, the strong are to uphold, to carry, to have broad shoulders for a good purpose.

Christians are to bear, not merely forbear; there must be patient submission and the endeavor to support the weakness of our brother by loving forethought and tenderness. (Griffith Thomas)

How do we accomplish this? How do we walk in love, consistently, fully, faithfully?

Well we find three things in this summary statement which are of greatest aids to us.

And I would want us to work backwards – from verse 3, to 2, to 1.

See the first and biggest basis of the strong (so called the strong for the first time, and Paul includes himself) is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your broad shoulders begin with His Broad Shoulders: verse 3.

The strong are only strong because Christ bears with us!

And oh what a bearing up indeed! See him stooping to the lowest place as man! Made of a woman, born under the law, and taking the place of his sinful, hell-deserving people. See him carrying the greatest weight imaginable – the cross! What is the cross but the full bulk of the wrath of God on his shoulders. He was crushed for you and me by our sin, by the law, by the Father as Judge!

But now see him rising up from the tremendous load! He lifts up his sheep by His tremendous, world-sustaining strength! See him lifting them from the grave! See Him lifting them up and out of the firm grip of the devil upon them! See Him rescuing them from the dominion of

sin! And where does He bring them? Not up to the high points of the earth or the mountains or the clouds, but the heights of heaven! And He does this for an uncountable host – millions upon millions!

He brings in not just a rescue but a full restoration, an everlasting righteousness in fullness of glory, in a new heavens and a new earth.

He stoops to the lowest reproach of men – becomes a worm and not a man! But lifts to a land of no shame, no reproach, no condemnation, no charges! Romans 8!

So, from a position of Christ's great shoulders, we are all to seek to broaden our shoulders.

Christ picked us up in our weakest estate. Jesus took our infirmities, the word for 'weakness', which means being sick, helpless, feeble and frail.

Will he stoop so low to care for sinners, for the weak, for enemies, and you won't? That is the point here.

You do not come from a lofty and strong place, do you? Can you who are of yesterday, too great to reach down to those who in need all around you, who struggle with their faith, their thoughts, their walk?

“He is the most advanced Christian who is most conformed to Christ and most willing to renounce his own ease or indulgence, and to endure reproach and suffering...” (Scott) ‘He, who is not at all conformed to Christ, is none of his.’ (Plumer)

But who can really be like Christ? Yet John in his first letter says this repeatedly! Three big little words: “Even as he!”

Walk in the light as he is in the light. Walk even as he walked. Purify yourselves even as he is pure. Love as he has loved.

But how discouraging for who can follow these great shoulders and such great footsteps!? How could any except that Jesus is in you and gives you grace!

So take this to heart: the great bedrock of bearing fully with weaker members of our own body, as Jesus cares for them.

Now our second point in the second verse – the Necessity for showing such love, kindness, bearing up with one another. How needful to please our neighbor; because our neighbor is needy!

Verse 2 is –**The Broad Needs of Broad Shoulders.**

This is the good outcome: the good that is done.

This what builds up rather than tears down and destroys, as we saw in the last chapter.

The church is likened to many things; a flock, a body, a family, a bride, a kingdom, and a temple.

We are also a house, a building, with foundation, bricks and mortar. Jesus is the Master-Builder ~ “Upon this rock I will build My Church...”

The word ‘edify’ here, to build up, is taken from the English word, “edifice”, a building.

All believers need to be built which is a picture of what? Strength! A building is a picture of strength, or is supposed to be. If it is made out

of sticks or straw, it will not keep the wolf away. If it is not built on a good foundation, it must fall.

This is a favorite picture from Paul

Encourage one another and build up one another... 1Thess 5:11
Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Eph. 4:29

1 Corinthians 8:1 Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.
1 Corinthians 10:23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. (1 Cor 10:23)

The church is built up by the Word of God, by the gospel of God, in the Holy Spirit, in love, by faith, by holiness.

So instead of throwing bricks at one another, the church is about building each other up, and especially the strong to the weak.

What happens when we do not please others by edifying them? What happens to them? What happens to us? What happens in the cause of Christ?

This is why we need the fellowship of the saints. How can we minister to others if we are alone? How can we be ministered to, if we are weak Christians?

There is clearly diversity in the body of Christ. There are little lambs and strong rams; there are members with greater muscle and skinny

believers. There are different parts to the plant – some are upheld by others.

The idea that the strong can afford to leave the weak behind changes the church radically. The church is to be a hospital, not a hierarchy and a caste system, made up of the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’.

The great and right use of strength is its use for the needy. It is to live as a steward, seeing that all of life, as a gift, is meant to be given away for the blessing of all and the glory of the God who gave it.

Not only is this edifying, it is also evangelistic. When the world sees the love of Christ in the variety in the church, they see One God and Father, One Lord, One Spirit.

That is how Paul saw it – the winsomeness of this:

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel... 1Co 9:22-23

Let’s answer those questions now: What happens when we do not please others by edifying them? What happens to them? What happens to us? What happens in the cause of Christ?

We are all going to please somebody. We can so easily fall into pleasing ourselves. We certainly don’t need to learn how to love ourselves, do we?

What happens to the weak when the strong do not serve them? They stay weak, or grow weaker. They are marginalized, unloved, forgotten.

What happens to the strong – they become weak! What happens when you don't use muscle? You lose it!

What happens to the cause of Christ?

Have we forgotten that when we love one another, we are loving the Lord Jesus? And like the love between spouses, to love others is to love ourselves in the church. When we love a fellow-believer, we are loving ourselves. Or are you not one with each other, as the Bible says?

Use your strengths; use your gifts; God gave them not just for yourself, but for the necessities of others!

Can you imagine a world where everyone loved others as they loved themselves!? We have not seen such a world.

This brings us to our final and quite important point. Such broad shoulders for others in verse 1, is commanded: “We who are strong **OUGHT** to bear”. We owe it to others, says Paul.

The broad authority and commands of Christ are that we would serve him in this way.

It is not a suggestion or an option. But that is how we feel about it, right? It would be good for us to serve others. Who doesn't want to be kind, or patient, or humble?

This is the good spur of the law in the life of the believer – not as a way to save us or keep us saved, which is the Lord's gracious work.

It is the enmity in our hearts toward what displeases God, the law written afresh on our hearts, that is the key. The authority of Christ

makes us say: “I don’t have the right to live however I please; I am freed from the slavery of Satan and sin; but I am saved unto live freely in the liberty of God’s holy, good and pleasing ways!”

We are saved from something, and to something!

A true Christian cannot continue in sin so that grace may abound. What a miserable time we have of it, brethren, when we relax our pursuit of the Lord and his smile, his glory, the enjoyment of His presence.

Jesus has not just purchased your forgiveness – that is half a gospel. He has purchased your regeneration, your new heart as well as a new record. You are made anew and meant for things above. And you cannot be happy unless your wings are spread in the skies of heavenly obedience to your loving Lord and Savior.

You no longer have the right, strong brother, to withhold from the Lord your service to His church; and you no longer have the right, weak brother, to stay weak in stubborn refusal to grow – for Paul says in 15:6... quote.

The great theologian pastor Jonathan Edwards put it this way: “Giving up myself to God, and all that I had to God; to be for the future in no respect my own, to act as one that had no right to be himself, in any respect.”

Can sum this up in the words of Paul to the elders at Ephesus:

"In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner **you must help the weak** and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that

He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Act 20:35)

We still have more helps ahead of us – especially in verse 4 – that of hope.

Let me here leave you with these words from Spurgeon:

Lord, if thou hast made us strong,
Let us learn to help the weak;
Bearing with each other long,
While the good of all we seek.

May we with one heart and mind
Seek the glory of thy name;
In one sacred league combined,
All our aims and hopes the same.

— **C.H. Spurgeon**

Prayer: Mt. 26:41. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.