

**Romans 15:1-13**  
**“He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother”**

- I. Intro**
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**I. Intro**

The fifteenth chapter continues on the theme of Christian ethics dealing with how to handle the grey areas that we so commonly disagree on. The summation of what Paul has already written is found in the first verse of chapter 15, “*We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*” ***The church can become so rigid and pessimistic that to the people outside the Church we don’t seem to believe what we preach that God wins!*** At a church board meeting the men gathered in prayer extolling the virtues of God, His power, presence, and provision but no sooner had they said amen, then the pastor said, “*Men the situation in the church is completely hopeless and nothing can be done!*” One board member boldly spoke up; “***Pastor before we go on with the situation I must say that either our prayer was full of meaningless words or your statement is untrue, because both can’t be true!***” **There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them!** In 1969 the Hollies adapted a Boy’s Town slogan into a hit with these words, “*The road is long with many a winding turn that leads to who knows where. But I’m strong, strong enough to carry him. He aint heavy, he’s my brother.*” That’s the heart attitude we should towards our fellow believer that we see as weak!

**II. Vs. 1-2 True mark of maturity**

Vs. 1 Christians are to bear with their fellow Christians and not just forbear with patience with their fellow believer. **The idea behind the word “bear with” isn’t to put up with the person because they are such a bear but rather support them because you are stronger than they are.**

The word “*ought*” is a word that can be rendered “*we owe it to them*”. **One of the most depilating diseases in all of humanity is the selfishness!** It knows no limitations and has seemed to affect all of us at some time. That’s the illness Paul has been addressing with regards to Christian’s esthetics. **The true mark of maturity is not to be found in our liberties alone; Paul says, but in our ability to love which is seen in laying those liberties aside for the benefit of others.**

Vs. 2 So when you have to decide about some grey area you have the freedom to practice you needed to ask yourself two questions:

1. **Does this action please my neighbor?** That is what Love is concerned with even if it means laying down our rights. J.B. Philips renders this: “*We who have strong faith ought to shoulder the burden of the doubts and qualms of the weak, and not just to go our own sweet way.*” God has asked each of us to judge ourselves and to seek to please others before self. He has told us that instead of insisting on our rights we need to bear other’s wrongs, instructing them instead of insisting on our way. We are not to just endure with those whom we consider weaker we are to encourage them, cheering them on.
2. **Does my giving up my freedom entrench my neighbor’s immaturity?** Paul is not talking about being a “*Man-Pleaser*” as this wouldn’t fit under the definition of being “*for their good or for their building up into maturity*”. We need to make sure that we don’t **give up** when we **give in**, as we are called to please our neighbor but **for their own good**, leaving them room to grow beyond their insecurity.

### III. Vs. 3-13 No hopeless situations

Vs. 3-12 These kinds of decisions are difficult to navigate to say the least. In the 1978 song by Kenny Rogers (The Gambler) he offered this advice “*You've got to know when to hold 'em! Know when to fold 'em! Know when to walk away! Know when to run!*” So to encourage us Paul gives his readers **four things that will help to “Know when to hold ‘em! When to fold ‘em, when to walk away and when to run”**.

1. **Vs. 3 The first example is Jesus’ who often encountered this problem.** According to Psalm 69:9 Jesus was willing to pay a tremendous price in order to serve us. Have you ever felt that you were unfairly being called upon to make a sacrifice by having to give up something that you felt was your right? Listen how Paul speaks of this in the NLT translation Philip. 2:5-8 “*Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross.*” The first thing to note with regards to Jesus is to realize that His compromise never involved displeasing or disrupting His relationship to the Father as He said in John 8:29 (I always live to please Him). **Laying down our rights doesn’t include laying aside our relationship to the Lord!** The 2<sup>nd</sup> point Paul makes is that our decision mustn’t be predicated upon or motivated by people’s response or bullying. **In other words when push came to shove Jesus was willing to please people but never at the expense of pleasing the Father!** You will see how Jesus practiced this for instance the passage in Luke 14:1-4 when the Pharisees took issue with Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath. He didn’t stop what He was doing He continued, ignoring their protest and finally took the time to correct their misunderstanding of the truth with regards to the Sabbath. Yet on another

time when they accused Him of not paying His taxes He sent Peter to catch a fish and when he would open the mouth he would find a coin to pay the taxes for both Peter and Himself and He said he was doing that as to not to offend them. At another time in Luke 7:34 Jesus said that there was no way to please some folks as they were upset at John the Baptist because he didn't eat, and drink and they were mad at Him because He did so with sinners. *A person's maturity is best measured not by how many years they have walked this earth with the personal knowledge of Jesus but rather how many times they have been willing to lay down their rights and privileges that they may be a blessing to someone else!*

- **So always seek to first please the Lord**
- **Never let people's reactions hinder you from pleasing the Lord**
- **Realize some folks just can't be pleased**

2. Vs. 4 **The 2nd thing we can count on to help us sort things out as it relates to behaving towards our fellow Christians in grey areas is the examples found in the scriptures, as the things written were done so for our learning.** You can read of people like Moses, who according to Hebrews 11:25 "*chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin*". There is the story of Jonathan, Saul's son who took off his robe and yielded his right to the throne to David because he knew that God had given it to him. **The key in all of these examples is that their actions were always motivated out of achieving the objective that God be glorified even if it meant they were not.**

3. Vs. 5-6 **The third thing we can count on to help guide us in our use of liberties is the Holy Spirit.** No matter what the situation the God of Patience and comfort will enable you to be like-minded (patient and full of comfort) towards one another. Often I find the biggest obstacle that need to be overcome for me to discern the right way of handling my liberty is ME! Paul couches this in words of a prayer which suggest to me that the place start with when there is disunity is to bow your heart before the Lord and ask Him to grant unity were discord exists. Paul says, “*pray for like-mindedness*”. Two people with different opinions on non-essentials will only come together if they first agree on the essentials and that is what we ought to be praying for. How do you know when you have achieved this unity in the Spirit? The outcome according to verse 6 will be praise to the Lord. ***Unity isn’t about compromising liberties it’s all about surrendering these up so that He alone will be praised.*** How often we fail to recognize that our chief aim is to glorify the Lord in all we say and do no matter what the cost to ourselves! Prayer is what starts the ball rolling which leads us to see our similarities instead of our differences which leads to our praising the Lord that He loves us in spite of us!
4. Vs. 7-12 **The final thing that helps us sort through our decisions is to realize that God’s side is always on reconciliation and never on separation.** The key word in this closing section is the word “*ministry*” it appears 4 times and Paul uses three different Greek words in English it appears as “*servant, minister and service*”. **The first word describes who we are, the 2<sup>nd</sup> word describes what we do, and the third word describes how we are to do it!** That was the purpose of Jesus sacrifice that in His body that through faith in Him that He would reconcile both mankind to God and people to people! In Isaiah 58:12 the prophet referred to Jesus saying that “*Those from among you shall build*

*the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the **Repairer of the Breach**, The **Restorer of Streets to Dwell In**.” Our God has always been a missionary God, One who’s heart is always to put together what we are so prone to tear apart! Looking at these quotations it is not immediately apparent that there is a progression in the promises listed but there is:*

- Vs. 9 Ps. 18:49 The Jews are seen as glorifying God **AMONG** the Gentiles.
- Vs. 10 Deut. 32:43 The Gentiles rejoice **WITH** the Jews.
- Vs. 11 Ps. 117:1 The Jews and Gentiles are **TOGETHER** praising God.
- Vs. 12 Isa. 11:10 Jesus is reigning **OVER** both Jew and Gentile.

Vs. 13 Paul concludes with a beautiful benediction of what you have available to achieve unity amongst the brethren. **All the great words of our faith appear here:** Hope twice, joy, peace, believing, abounding and of course the Holy Spirit by Whom all the above are appropriated to us to bring about this unity in the body of Christ. Saints let’s try something new in our Christian life: ***“Let’s start believing our beliefs and doubting our doubts!”*** Instead of ***“Believing our doubts and doubting our beliefs!”*** Disunity and disagreement do not glorify God, in fact they rob Him of it. In Genesis 13:8 Abram talked it over with Lot over a disagreement and said, ***“This arguing between our herdsmen has got to stop,” he said. “After all, we are close relatives!”*** I might add another two reasons to Abram’s words, ***“It breaks Dad’s heart!”*** and ***“The neighbors are watching!”***