

### Romans 15:7-13

***<sup>7</sup> Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. <sup>8</sup> Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, <sup>9</sup> and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name." <sup>10</sup> And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" <sup>11</sup> And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" <sup>12</sup> And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope." <sup>13</sup> Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.***

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome. Wherever the apostles went, they usually started with Jewish converts. In the book of Acts, the first places they preached were the synagogues, the first converts were Jews and then came the gentile believers. Paul was writing to the elder and stronger brother about the younger and weaker brother, how they should accept one another. The onus is upon the stronger to adjust with the one who is weak in faith, without judging or condemning, so that he can lead a weak brother into becoming strong in the Lord. Why does he say that? Because that is the way Christ Jesus received us.

There was a very gifted and talented singer, Charlotte Elliot, who used to sing only secular songs. One day she held a party in her house to which a servant of God was invited. When she sang that evening, the man of God told her, *You are wasting your voice on the world. God gave you this voice, this talent. It was meant to glorify God.* She got very angry with him. She was a popular and successful person but after she spoke to him she couldn't sleep, she was very restless. Later she came to the Lord and wrote the hymn, *Just as I am, without one plea.. I come.* We need to realize that we all came to God just as we were. We were absolutely lost sinners, with no trace of witness in us, we needed mercy. Today, because we are cleansed, we come to God as the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. But when we first came to Him, we came as sinners. He asks us, *How did God receive you?*

***<sup>7</sup> Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God***

Christ Jesus received us as His own children. In the same way we should receive one another. When a weaker brother, a new person comes to the Lord, he's a baby Christian. Don't try to teach him spiritual principles which are meant for him to learn when he becomes mature in the Lord. Don't try to teach him what to eat or wear, all these are outward things. They come much later, as they grow in the Lord and become mature. The Lord Himself will start ministering to them. Accept the weak brother as he is, love him the way Christ Jesus loves him. We need to keep this principle in mind that whenever a new person comes to the Lord, we receive them without any reservations. We don't make them comfortable in their sin but we accept them as they are.

This is very important for us when we meet new people after the Sunday service. We assume that they are Christians but may be they aren't. They may be from Christian backgrounds, from churches even, but they may not be saved. It is important that we fellowship with them, talk to them. There was a sister who visited for a while and then didn't come for a couple of Sundays. Ailsa managed to get her number and talk to her. She said she didn't come to church because *Nobody contacted me.* I felt bad because I had her number but I got one digit wrong. When you come to church, look around. Only then will you know if any one hasn't come. We don't realize that just one call could make a whole lot of difference to them. In most churches, nobody bothers. They go in and sit there Sunday after Sunday, but nobody bothers with them. We don't want one more church like that, do we? Not that we are special but we want to be known as people who really care for one another. Accept one another the way Christ Jesus accepted us.

Jesus was a very open person. Did you know that? There is a strange line which most people don't notice.

### John 1:35-39

***<sup>35</sup> Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup> And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> Then Jesus turned, and seeing them***

***following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?"<sup>39</sup> He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).***

John the Baptist said, *Behold the Lamb of God!* Hearing that, two of his disciples started following Jesus so He turned around and asked them, *What do you seek?* They asked Him, *Where do You live?* He told them, *Come and see.* They went and stayed with Jesus for a day. He was saying, *Come and see how I live and then decide for yourself if you want to follow Me or not.* There was a clear openness about Jesus. The world we live in talks more and more about private space, *Don't intrude into my space, I want my privacy!* We all have our little areas of privacy but sometimes it becomes like a fortress, we don't let anyone in nor do we get out. But Jesus was open about where and how He lived. What is God talking about? This openness should begin at the church.

Some people complain to me that nobody talks to them in the church. These are people who come regularly. I ask them, *Did you talk to anybody?* There are some people who wait for someone to come and talk to them, though they have been sitting in that church for years. They say, *That is the way I am.* But you need to change, if that is how you are, that is not how you are supposed to be! You may have been born that way but that is not the way you were when you were born again. You need to try, don't quietly slip away. Try and get to know and talk to people. I don't mean that you must make friends with all the people in church, but God will definitely lead you to a brother or a sister, with whom you can be good, believing friends. God will lead you to someone with whom you can share, to whom you can be accountable or who would like to be accountable to you. You take spiritual responsibility in the church.

You need to have someone within the body of believers, to whom you are accountable. Then someone else may say to you, *Sister/brother, I am making myself accountable to you.* You suddenly find you have a responsibility to carry. Leading worship and preaching are not the only responsibilities in a church. There is so much more, we are accountable to one another, to pray for one another. There are many people who don't pray for anyone else, they don't even know what others need, apart from what is announced in the church. That is because they don't fellowship. We don't receive each other the way Christ receives us. How does Christ Jesus receive me today? What does the Word of God say about it? It says He is my advocate in heaven before the Father. That's what He is doing for me today. He's putting all my needs, my requests before the Father, speaking on my behalf to the Father. He says to us, *Accept each other in the same way. We will then belong to each other.*

If you don't do this and remain in the church, you develop the attitude of Cain, saying, *Am I my brother's keeper?* We need to ask ourselves if we are truly our brother's keeper. Scripture says he wandered away from God, further and further. These are spiritual wanderers, they wander from place to place though they are regular to church. They wander because they don't want to take any responsibility in life. When you take responsibility for another human being, you are asking for trouble because nice people don't need help, they walk with the Lord. There are many people going through trouble and trauma. When they come into your life, they disturb your life. We prefer to pray, *Lord bless me, bless my wife, bless my children, amen.* We don't want anything more. But God says He will bring troubled people into our boat and they will rock the boat. That's the way He accepted us and therefore we need to also accept one another in the same way. There are many people in churches around the world, burning up energy without utilizing it, just taking up space. They are takers, I don't mean in terms of money. Within the overall body of Christ we need to ask ourselves, *In whom have I invested? What have I invested in the Kingdom of God? Am I only a taker?*

If you seek God's will for you, He will open a door so that you can become a giver. There is no point in just receiving from God. When we receive from Him, wells of living water rise within us. But when we become givers, rivers of living water flow from within us. What happens if water remains stagnant? Nobody uses it! So many people are sitting with stagnant grace, if something like that is possible. Remember, manna went bad! Stagnant grace, because we do not give! We count what it costs us and think, *No, if I go I could be harmed. I may lose my joy, my time. I could get miserable* but that's all part of giving.

Paul teaches us that Jesus Christ Himself, the truth of God, became a servant to the circumcision, i.e. servant to the Jews for the truth of God to confirm the promises made to the father. The promises were made to the father, right from the time of Adam to whom it was told *The seed of the woman*, and to Abraham who was told, *In your seed all the nations shall be blessed.* He came to confirm the promises the Father had given. He also came that the gentiles might glorify God. The

promises were given not only to the Jews but also for the gentiles. If it were not so, we would be a people without hope, salvation would be only for the Jews. No, it was also for the gentiles that He came.

**<sup>13</sup> Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Paul keeps saying, *The God of hope*. Why does he say that? What do joy and peace signify if you have no hope for tomorrow? If I have the joy and peace of the Lord but no hope, I may think I am going to hell. All three are connected, they have no relevance without hope, which is always about our tomorrow. When we see the hope of glory, we know where we are going.

**<sup>14</sup> Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.**

There are three things he mentions here as he reaches the conclusion of his letter. He says, *I myself am confident concerning you*, this is to the church in Rome that they are full of goodness and knowledge and also able to admonish one another. We would like to change that order so that *admonish one another* comes first, and after that goodness and knowledge! We have to be full of goodness and knowledge before we start rebuking and correcting our brethren. Only then would we know if and how we should admonish.

**<sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

How do you know you have the fullness, the goodness of God? Everybody knows that God is good but how does that goodness come into us? When we know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, then we will be filled with the goodness of God. Before we admonish a brother we need to ask ourselves, *Do I have the love of God? Do I really love him?* We like to admonish and correct, but God asks to check if our hearts are controlled by the love of Christ, for that person? Do you really grieve for that person? When you see a person is in the wrong and you want to correct him, does your heart really grieve for him? Does your heart really care? Are you truly interceding for him? Some people like admonishing but have no love, like the Pharisees, who were harsh. The woman caught in adultery was brought and thrown at Jesus' feet. There was no love in them! But they brought her for admonition and asked Jesus, *What does the law say? What are you going to do?* Only Jesus was fit to judge because He truly loved the woman. He did not cancel that law out, every part of the law had to be kept. Instead He said, *Whoever is without sin let him judge!*

Who is one who can be without sin? The one who loves God with all his heart, his might, his strength and loves his neighbor as himself! That is the law. If you love then you will have kept the law. If you love, you will not throw a stone either. When Jesus said, *Whoever is without sin throw the first stone*, everybody left. The only one who could have thrown the stone was Jesus, but He said, *I forgive you. Go in peace and sin no more*. This is the fullness of God's love. Do we have it in our hearts? Paul says, *My prayer for you is that you are also full of goodness*. This is not about the goodness of the world, which has more to do with the self than the person to whom good is being done. Many people do good deeds because their religion says it will be good for them. But the goodness God speaks of is prompted by love, irrespective of what you get out of it. In fact, with Christian love, you find that when you love someone the way Christ asked you to love, you get nothing back. You may probably get brickbats. But that is the goodness which God speaks of. It is not about receiving anything.

We get comfortable in our own churches because we love one another. What's great about that? Even the people in the world do that. They love those who are good to them, we are good to one another. If our love stops there, we are only as good as the world. That is what missions are about. Why do we encourage people to visit the juvenile homes? What can they give you? All they do is give you a list of their wants, mattresses, medicines and so on. They can give nothing in return. When you visit the prisons, they can't give you anything. Their thanks will not change your life. The hospitals, the old age homes, none of them can give you anything but those are the places God wants you to visit. That is the test of pure love. When you go to those who cannot give you anything, then you know the goodness within you is from God.

On the other hand, there are some who only help people who are of use to them. Like the shrewd steward in that controversial parable Jesus gave. I have received calls from different parts of the country about that message. The

controversy was over whether Jesus was commending him for doing wrong. What Jesus meant was that the man was wise in the world, using his resources to make friends to be there in the time of his trouble. God says to us, Children, I have given you vast resources. Make use of them so that you will have someone to speak for you on the Day of Judgment! On that Day Jesus has to speak on my behalf. He will ask me, *I gave you 50 or 60 years or 70 years on earth and put much into your hands. What did you do with it? Did you use it for My Kingdom? If you did, then I shall speak for you. If you used it for yourself I can't speak for you.*

**Luke 16:1-9**

<sup>1</sup> *He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. <sup>2</sup> So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' <sup>3</sup> "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup> I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' <sup>5</sup> "So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' <sup>6</sup> And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' <sup>7</sup> Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' <sup>8</sup> So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. <sup>9</sup> "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.*

He says, *If you have worldly riches, be careful how you use them.* Large corporations make regular pay-offs to the government. It is a regular payment so that when they want a contract, they know whom to call. It could be the customs department or the income tax, all are greased by people who will need a favor someday. But God is not telling us to do that. He says, *Use your worldly riches to gain friends for yourself.* Where? Not here, in Heaven! Why? So that you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings, not temporary ones! What do we use our resources for? Our time? Our lives? What do we use our possessions for? Do we invest in God's kingdom? Invest in the lives of other people? I am not talking about a salvation by works but about the rewards that are based on works. Jesus said, *In My Father's house are many mansions, I go to prepare a room for you.* But your mansion will depend on where you invested your money, your life, your time on this earth. It is going to decide your position up there.

**Colossians 3:16**

<sup>16</sup> *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

Only after we reach all this, can we admonish. Here it talks about admonishing one another and *Romans 15:14* talks about being able to admonish. But to do so we need to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom. Why is that important? So that our admonishing, our reproof, counsel, rebuke is scriptural. Sometimes the counsel, reproof or correction we give has nothing to do with Scripture. We give advice according to the flesh, we think it is good advice but actually it is bad because it has nothing to do with Scripture. Almost everyone has some problem or other, and we tend to give advice based on that problem and not according to Scripture. When a person struggles or compromises in an area of sin or weakness, if he / she gives counsel, he is tempted to deal lightly with that type of sin, giving counsel according to his feelings. You need to be tough on it because it's not about your struggle or compromise, the Word of God alone is the standard.

When Nathan confronted David using that story about the poor man and the rich man, how did David react? He got very angry but why didn't he compromise? He was living a compromised life so why didn't he compromise when it came to judgment? Even when he was living in sin, he never justified his sin. In the Psalm he said, *My bones are wasting away.* He was probably relieved when Nathan confronted him with it. When he judged, his judgment was right. In our church we have many single parents. If a single parent is mentoring someone and they ask for counsel, remember that your experience is never the norm. I never advise any man or woman to divorce or separate, as far as possible. The other day someone said to me, *But brother my husband committed adultery!* I asked, *Does he want to remain with you?* She said, *Yes, he does.* In that case God says, *Hang on and give it a chance.* But if there is violence I suggest that they separate until they can be reconciled. There may be real issues where they can't live together but I only ask them why they want to push for a divorce.

Last week I had to deal with a serious situation where the couple were wanting a divorce and I told them, *Don't do it*. One man asked me, *Can I leave my wife for this woman?* I said, *No you can't*, a woman asked me the same thing. They think I will agree, they don't realize I never will. If it is unbearable, separation may be acceptable for a season but even that, I generally don't suggest if they have no scriptural grounds.

The danger to a believer who pushes for divorce is that they bring themselves under the judgment that they have hardness of heart. We are not even discussing issues which involve the custody of children. I usually ask the couple if either one is thinking about remarriage. Generally one of them falls silent. I know this is going off the topic a bit, but some of you give counsel. If you are talking to someone about divorcing and remarriage, always remind them of what they will be carrying into the next marriage. According to statistics more than 50% of first marriages fail, while second marriages have a failure rate of 80%. Not all second marriages fail, there are successful ones like Joyce Meyer's. Why do they fail? They fail because they get into a second marriage when they are not ready for it. They go in thinking it will solve their problems. What they need to ask, like Jesus, *What can I give?* Not *what can I take?* Joyce Meyer's marriage didn't become perfect over night, it took years of struggle on her part. He was okay but she wasn't. It all fell into place when David Meyer finally said, *If you push me anymore I'll walk out of this marriage*. That's when she realized the problem was with her and not with him. You generally carry baggage from the first marriage into the second one. You need to be delivered of that baggage, learn to stand on firm ground and be able to handle your life, your children. Then you are ready to think about a second marriage because you have something to offer. If you are struggling as a single parent, you are not ready for a second marriage.

Even those who are unmarried, don't look at marriage as an escape. When you enter into marriage, think about what you can give. Then you will always be happy. If you go in as a giver, you will always be happy. Girls and boys carry romantic illusions drawn from movies. Those are unreal, they end on the screen, it happens only in fairy tales that they lived happily ever after. In real life, they fight most days. But when they remain under the covenant and the commitment, at the end of the fighting they do not go to sleep in anger. As they get to know each other, they gain more wisdom. That's what God is talking about. We should go in His wisdom.

Show me one perfect marriage in the Bible. There were three perfect, God-ordained marriages. Adam and Eve, it was an absolute failure. Isaac and Rebekah, they were good for a season. Then when the children grew older the family got divided. The third one was Ruth and Boaz, that was a successful second marriage. Abraham and Sarah probably got married when they were unbelievers, so it was not a God-ordained marriage. Eve was created by God, there couldn't have been a better match than her, she was made to order, by God. But it didn't work. Rebekah and Isaac split over the children. It happens when parents have favorites within the family. When there is more than one child, though we love them all, they are different from each other. Love them the same way but don't try to make them alike or compare them, don't play favorites. In India sons are favorites with their mothers, fathers favour the daughters. Isaac's favorite was Esau, Rebekah's was Jacob. They played favorites over the Word of God and the family split apart. It ended with the death of Rebekah, she never saw Jacob again and there was enmity between the two brothers.

When young people come for pre-marriage counseling, one of the first things I ask is that they be prepared for reconciliation. I say that to them even before they marry, because they will fight. The time of courtship and marriage are entirely different. When he is courting, a man puts on his best behavior. After marriage he shows his worst! Courtship is filled with sweethearts, honeys and darlings. He does everything for her, pulls out the chair for her to sit, sends her flowers, takes her out! A few weeks after they are married he asks, *Where is my tea? Why are all my things lying around here?* Now he doesn't do anything for her but he wants things to be done for him! But that's how two people get together and find common ground, because they love each other.

That's what God says, *Be rich in the wisdom*. The Word of God paints people as they are. It is not a spruced up biography. People look like saints in their biographies. We see no mention of corruption charges or any negative side, only the best things are written up. But God writes about everybody just the way it is. The only biography which is entirely perfect is that of Jesus, of whom He said, *Here is My Son, in whom I am well pleased*. Just that one line, repeated later on the Mount of Transfiguration, *Hear ye Him*. A certificate given by the Father above, the perfect Biographer. But of all the others, we get to see them as they were. It gives us hope because they ended well in spite of how they were when they started. Look at how Abraham was, how Sarah was and how they ended. It gives us hope. Jacob was a deceiver but he ended up as Israel, bestowing prophetic blessing, even on his death bed, without making a mistake like his father. We get to see the beginning

and the end. Saul began excellently. Humble. When they looked for him, they couldn't find him because he was hiding in the baggage. That is how he was, humble at heart, a simple man, he wouldn't say anything against his enemy. He said, *No this is not the day to fight, to take revenge*. That is how he began. Then David entered the picture and jealousy sprang up. Saul couldn't handle it and he ended badly. But David ended up the way he began. When God judged David, he said, *Who am I? I know who I am. I know where you picked me from*. Before you judge, give reproof or admonish, see that you dwell richly in the Word of God. There is something else in the Word of God which I show unmarried boys and girls.

### **1 Corinthians 7:8**

<sup>8</sup> ***"But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: it is good for them to remain even as I am".***

I am not against marriage. But when they ask me to pray that they get a godly partner I ask if they have read what the Word of God has to say, ***it is good for them to remain even as I am***. But if they can't remain single then it is good to seek to marry. That should be the reason. However, if you are unmarried, you can serve God with an undivided heart. Do you love God with all your heart, all your mind, all your strength? If this is the deep calling on your life, then why do you want to get married? Ask God for the gift of celibacy. You can only do half the work if you are married and in ministry. But if you are unmarried and have the gift of celibacy then you can be like Paul or Father Berchmans. I am not talking about all catholic priests, I am speaking specifically of Father Berchmans, a Jesuit Priest who left the church and was used mightily by God. He had no restraints, no attachments, nothing. Millions of rupees poured into his ministry and they were able to spend it the same way. The man still wore his old robe. He did not need to save up anything for his wife or children, he was only interested in the Kingdom, the Lord and His people. He was able to have an undivided heart. So when you give counsel, don't tell every young person that they must get married. It is not necessarily so. Do you really love the Lord and want to serve Him with your entire potential? Look at the unmarried people in the Bible who served God! Peter had a problem. His mother-in-law fell sick so he had to take Jesus to her house to pray for her. Whenever he went, he took his wife along.

### **1 Corinthians 9:5**

<sup>5</sup> ***"Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us as do the other Apostles and the Lords brothers and Cephas"?***

What if Cephas' wife was not a believer? He could not have taken her along with him when he travelled on ministry. These are little lines in the Bible which we often miss. God may call you long after you get married. If your wife or husband is not interested in the ministry, what would you do? Can you take them along? Can you partner with them? That is why I say, as soon as your children come to know the Lord, encourage them to find out what is God's will for their life. Don't start telling them they must get married. If God wills that you get married, your future spouse must be living somewhere. Ask God to tune your spirit to that one person so that when you meet you will recognize him or her, just as Rebecca with Isaac. Then you won't make any mistake. You will be with the person who is also tuned to God's call over his or her life. Don't tell your children, *I am looking for a spouse for you. I have put an advertisement in the paper. Take a look at the proposals that have come for you!* Why did Paul say this? Because it can become a hindrance! Marriage in itself is not wrong, he doesn't say that. He says it is good. But he asks us to think about the times in which we live, anyone who gets married is getting into trouble. It doesn't matter how good the husband or wife is. If there were to be an important call of God on your life, that call would get compromised because you are caught between serving your spouse and serving God. If your spouse is willing and has the same zeal for the Lord, it will be well or else there will be strife.

Be sure you are dwelling richly in the wisdom of Christ when you counsel, give godly counsel. When they come to you they should be confident that you are full of goodness, which comes because of the love of God, filled with all knowledge of the Word of God. Then you will be able to admonish one another.

### **Romans 15:14**

<sup>14</sup> ***"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another."***

Why does it say 'also'? Some people are full of goodness, love and knowledge but they can't admonish. They prefer not to. Even when they see an erring brother or sister, they will not call them in private and have the courage to speak to them

about it and warn them of what could happen. They are more concerned with retaining a superficial friendship than seeing the salvation of that brother.

**James 5:19-20**

<sup>20</sup> ***“My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins”.***

Sometimes a brother might get offended, people don't want to be told about their sin. But if you really love that person, you will tell them. Can you imagine how Nathan went to David? How many prophets went to kings and told them of their sins and went back alive in Israel? Did that stop Nathan? Pastor Prabhu Kumar showed us how Elijah's history began. The difference between Elijah's and Elisha's history is that we know which home Elisha came from, where he was employed, and other details. But of Elijah all we know is that he was called the Tishbite. He appeared suddenly, out of the blue and went to Ahab to tell him it would not rain for the next three and a half years. Can you imagine doing that? Did Elijah love Ahab? Yes, he did. He told him, *Hurry, the storm is coming soon!* Didn't he cry out and pray for him? Are we able to correct our brothers? Sometimes we see someone close to us do something wrong. But we want them to love us so we pretend we didn't see them do wrong. I don't mean that we should point fingers and make humiliating remarks. But we should call them aside and talk to them, scripture shows us how to do these things. But do we do that? Or do we hide?

Another trend in the ministry today, especially TV ministries, is to not preach sin. If they do, it will affect their offerings. If I were to preach a tough sermon on sin and Eric gets offended, would he put in his offering? He would walk away and not return the next Sunday. They have changed the gospel to make you feel good so that you put your money in the offering bag. The money keeps coming in but what about the souls of these people? Some TV preachers even announced that God has given to them only to preach gospel of hope. Scripture doesn't say that, does it?

**Acts 20:20**

<sup>20</sup> ***“And how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house” ...<sup>26</sup>“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men, <sup>27</sup> for I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God”.***

He is innocent of the blood of all men because he preached the entire counsel of God. The good, the bad and the ugly! To be innocent of the blood of people, sometimes we have to admonish them of things that will cost them in eternity. If we see Eric has a torn pocket, his wallet is about to fall out, and we keep quiet and say nothing about it to him, what would happen? His wallet would fall out somewhere and someone would pick it up and walk away. So what kind of people does that make us? When we see it is going to cost him and say nothing about it, he would say, *You are not my friends. You rejoiced in my loss.* One day a lot of Christians up in heaven will look at their pastors and preachers and say, *You never really loved me. You never told me the whole truth and because of that I have lost in eternity and I can't make up.* There are no make-up exams in heaven. It is appointed unto every man to die once and then he is judged. They do not speak about salvation, they don't talk about things we need to do to make our rewards and crowns sure in heaven. They are scared of offending people and desire their friendship. That's the difference between Saul and David.

Saul clutched at Samuel's robe and it tore, so Samuel told him, *Just the way you tore my robe, your kingdom will be torn away from you.* What did Saul say? *Just stand by me. If the people see you standing beside me, they will think God is with me. That's enough for me! Stand by me!* He wanted the people to think that God was with him so he asked the prophet to stand by him. *Don't tell them all the things you told me! You just stand by me. Outward appearance is enough!* Did David say that when Nathan came to him? His cry was not about the kingdom, the crown or the throne. What did he cry out? *Please do not take your Holy Spirit from me. That is the only thing I desire, the rest I count as loss, I don't want anything else. If you take your Holy Spirit from me, then whatever I have is worthless to me, it has no meaning.*

When you reprove somebody, be sure you love him, give him counsel that is rich in the Word of God and make sure you do not hide the truth from him, which would actually save him. Philip Yancey, the famous evangelical author, wrote powerful books till he wrote *What is so amazing about Grace* which caused much offence because he supported a close friend who left his wife for a gay partner. He called it grace but that's not grace. As a good friend he should have stood up and confronted him and told him he was wrong. There is deliverance from every sin. Grace doesn't accept sin. That's where we

need to be careful. There are times when we have to stand up and speak. In the process, we may lose a friend but if that friend is wise, he will accept the reproof as from a true friend.

The Book of Proverbs says, *Better are the wounds of a friend than flattery*. Somewhere else it says, *Better are the wounds of a righteous man than flattery*. But we don't like wounds. When someone points out to us the area in which we are wrong, we get offended. When I preach from the pulpit, I have this, not fear exactly, but a burden that people should not get offended. Offense is a very difficult thing to get over, and the Word of God shouldn't offend you. You should realise that the person is not speaking of his own, but is just telling you what Jesus said in His word. Some people get offended and walk away when they think that their family or church traditions are under attack.

**Proverbs 27:6**

***<sup>6</sup> Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.***

Wounds from a friend can be trusted but an enemy multiplies kisses. If someone is close to us and we know he is in the wrong and don't speak about it, but speak about everything else, he says, those are like the kisses of an enemy. A person who doesn't really love you! When Peter said Jesus was the Christ, Jesus said, *Peter, flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. You got this from My Father*. A few minutes later He told Peter, *Get behind Me, Satan*. He never minced his words. Both His statements were from the same God. He rebuked them but He also loved them.

**Romans 15:15**

***<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God,***

Paul writes this to the church in Rome, *I'm writing of tougher things to you, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God*. He said these things to them boldly, believing in their maturity to receive it, without getting offended knowing that it is from the grace of God,

**Romans 15:16**

***<sup>16</sup> that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the Gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.***

You need to realize that if you are called to minister, it is a call by God and never by people. Nobody should be called into ministry by people. That's why a minister is called God's servant. Saul was the people's king, David was God's chosen king. We see the difference in their response whenever God corrected them. As the people's king, Saul always responded to the people. He was concerned about what they thought of him but David was more concerned about what God thought of him. A minister is called God's servant because even while he is serving people, he is serving God. The people should never think that because he is serving them, he is their servant. This happens in many mainline churches, where the people decide what the pastor should and should not do or say. They think he is their servant without realizing that he is actually God's servant. If God tells him to, he might even sweep their houses. But even in that he would still be serving God, not man. As long as he is clear on that, he will never change his doctrine. But if he becomes the people's servant, he will change his doctrine to suit them. That is when they go into error, even many great men of God. They started out well, strong in doctrine and the Word. Then they became popular, the people praised them and looked up to them; gradually the Word they preached began to change and they went into error.

**Galatians 1:11**

***<sup>11</sup> But I make known to you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup> For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.***

***<sup>8</sup> But even if we, (he is talking about the apostles) or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other Gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. <sup>10</sup> For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.***

Mark that in your Bible! Everyone of us is in ministry at some level or the other. In that ministry, if you try to please anyone,

you immediately cease being a servant of God. We are not here to please man, he may or may not be pleased. The purpose of our ministry is to always and only please God. We don't change our ministry to please men. We see this change taking place in one of the seven churches. It is a sign given to us. Which church was that? The Laodicean Church! Laodicea means 'people's rule'. Of the seven letters written to the seven churches, only in this one does God say 'To the church of the Laodiceans', to all the other churches it was written, 'The church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamos, and so on. The church in Ephesus belongs to God but the church of the Laodiceans belongs to the people. Where is Jesus in that letter? *I stand at the door and I knock*. He is standing outside, the people rule, they make every decision, He has nothing to do with it. He knocks from outside, asking that He be let in. That's what Paul says, *If I please men, I cease to be a servant of God. I have boldness to remind you of everything, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.*

**Romans 15:16**

**<sup>16</sup> *that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the Gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.***

Why is it important for us to be servants of God and not of the people? Only as God's servant can we know the purpose of our ministry. We usually begin by going to the gentiles, the unbelievers. What then, is the end purpose? It is *that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit*. We don't change the gospel and say, *Brother, if you come to the Lord, He will bless you, your wife, your children. Everything in your house will be blessed*. We don't have change it to make it sound good to them. What they need to know is that if they don't get saved, they will go to hell. The Day of Judgment is coming. Maybe they will get offended, but they need to know that everyone of us is a sinner, we need to repent and receive Jesus or else we go to hell. They need to be convicted of their sins. To what end? For the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit on them, so that the offering of the unbeliever to the Holy Spirit, to the Lord, should be acceptable. Think of all the years we grew up in church. Was our offering acceptable before God? Did we hear about separation? Did we hear about sanctification? Did we hear about holiness and godliness? We never heard these things being preached. These topics were never even touched.

**Romans 15:16(b)-17**

***the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable*, once, we all were gentiles, *sanctified by the Holy Spirit*.<sup>17</sup> ***Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.*****

Then we shall have reason to glory in Christ Jesus. Why? Because we have not compromised in the things that belong to God, we haven't changed the message. We cannot change the message because it is not ours to change, it did not come from man that it should change according to man's needs. The purpose of ministry is to present people to God, holy and acceptable. We go to hospitals, homes, old age homes and prisons, we have an orphanage and a rescue home but there is an end purpose to ministry. The rescue home is not just to rescue people from their situations but to also bring them into the house of God and then, be sanctified, separated and used for God's glory. That's the end purpose. Sometimes, we forget it.

Do you remember a boy from Don Bosco who came to our church? He grew up as an orphan and is in his second year in engineering. He still goes to the temple to worship because they never told him about salvation. They said, *You were born a Hindu and we brought you up. You can return to your temples if you wish. It is okay with us*. Yet, aren't they doing a charitable work? They do a much better job than we do. How well they take care of the old people! Good food, free medicine, free medical checkups, they do it all. They are devoted and committed, but, for what? The sad thing is that our orphanages, old age homes, rescue homes run in the name of the church but they have become storehouses for hell. They have forgotten the purpose of their ministry. They don't even know it. That's what Jesus told the Pharisees, *You will the cross the oceans to make one convert and then make him double the slave that you are*.

That's the sad thing about it, we forget the purpose. We have children in our orphanage. Why are we doing this work? So that they can be sanctified and separated and made acceptable to the Lord! Why do we have Bible studies? Why do we insist that you come for the Wednesday and Sunday services? Why do you have to listen to the Word? Why do the children have to attend Sunday school? Why do they have to go through the Bible every day of the week? It is not because they are orphans. They have to be offered, acceptable and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. That is the end vision of our ministry, starting with our families, then to the churches and to all the ministries. Even at home, the end result of our life is that our

own children should one day be holy and acceptable in God's sight. If we miss that purpose, it doesn't matter if they become the President of India, they would have lost. I am not sure if any of our Presidents made it to Heaven. K R Narayan's wife was a very committed Christian. Radhakrishnan studied the gospels but more as an intellectual exercise.

We need to ask ourselves, what are we preparing our homes for? What are we preparing our churches for? What is our ministry's end purpose? If you forget the end purpose you will change the message. Then it is no longer Christianity, it becomes Communism. What does the Communist say? The ends justify the means. That's not the way we are supposed to be. Our focus is the end which also defines the way we do things and therefore, the means too are very important. How do we do our ministry, how do we deal with our families, our children? What is the end? To be holy, separated unto God! That is our purpose. Amen! Let us pray!

**Closing Prayer:**

*Father, we thank You, we praise You, God, we worship You, God. Thank You, Lord. Thank You Father, even as we study the Word, week after week, O Master, we pray, Lord, that You will fill our hearts with Your love, with Your goodness, Your counsel, Your wisdom. Father, help us to be true and honest with our brethren, O Master, not desiring their friendship alone but risking even losing their friendship for the sake of Your truth and our love for them, O Master. Help us, O God, to be honest with ourselves first and with one another, Master. And I pray, Father, today, that Your peace will rest in this house. I believe that the work of separation and sanctification is continuing though we may not see it with our naked eyes, but I believe, O God that You are doing it. That is true for everyone here, O God. Continue to speak to them and give us the courage and boldness to face them with the truth, O Master, and not to shrink back, fearing losing their love and their affection and their support, O Master, because their salvation is worth more than anything else, O Master. Thank You, Father. Thank You. I bring the Church, once again before Thee, plead the Blood of Jesus over Your people, wherever they are, Father. May Your hand rest upon them, heal those who are sick, deliver those who are in trouble, all their ways, guard them and keep them. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*