

“Gulls or Geese”

August 25, 2019

James 4:7-17

Thank you for an opportunity to preach God’s Word again today. Please find with me the fifteenth chapter of Romans.

You probably didn’t know this. But, there’s a huge difference between seagulls and geese. This past week, in preparation for today’s message, I discovered that here in Old Saybrook we have both. Actually, we’ve got about seven different species of gulls and we’ve got no less than eight species of geese, with about 18,000 Canadian geese.

Now, what did I discover about seagulls and geese this week? That you’re either like a seagull or you’re like a goose. So, which do you think you are most like?

Let’s start with the gulls. “Gulls are beautiful. Watch one sometime and you’ll see it gracefully and gently floating on the sea breeze down at Cornfield Point. Gulls are social creatures; kind of like us, in fact.

But, most of the time, they act like they can’t stand each other. They squabble. They are vicious competitors. They posture, they fight; they eat each other’s eggs. If one seagull sees another seagull eating a piece of food, it will attack it and steal its food; even in mid-air. And, when a seagull is weak, or damaged in some way, or sick or injured, the other seagulls will physically pick on it and even pick it to death. It’s quite common even to find that young gulls are often killed by older gulls.

Someone tied a red ribbon around the leg of a seagull to see how the rest of the flock would react. Since the one with

the red ribbon stood out among them, they became envious. They attacked it to death.

There’s also an understanding among gulls, an uneasy peace which is built on a strict code of status and seniority. The top gulls, usually the most mature, are likely to get the best real estate at the centre of the colony.”; quote [Found on <https://www.jstor.org> “Habits Of The Herring Gull” by R. M. Strong and <https://www.donen-right.com> “Seven Habits of Highly Effective Seagulls” by Don Enright and a video sermon by Pastor J. P. Clayton at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtDpLt65aP4>]; also <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws> “Goose or Gull?” by a writer from the Samoa Observer].

So, you say, you’re not like a seagull, right?

Well then, there’s the goose. And how is the goose so different from the gull? Here’s how. The stronger geese make sure that the weaker, the ill, the young, *and* the old geese are encouraged. They do it, by the way, by honking a particular honk. Every wonder why they honk so much? Apparently, the honk is a constant encouragement to the weaker geese to keep going, even when it’s tough.

Now, if one of the geese gets tired from flying, or gets sick, or hurt, they are *never* abandoned. Let’s say a goose drops out of the v-formation as it flies. One or even two of the healthy geese will drop out; stay with him and protect him from the attacks of other animals. It will encourage him while he rests; and staying even, if necessary, until he dies.

So, given what you now know about gulls and geese, which are you more like?

Please look with me at today’s verse from Romans fifteen and see just how this huge difference between seagulls and geese applies; verse one.

Romans 15:1 *“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (2) Let every one of*

us please his neighbour for his good to edification. (3) For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, the reproaches [insults] of them that reproached [insulted] thee fell on me.

(4) For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (5) Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: (6) That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (7) Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."

I've titled today's message "Gulls Or Geese" Shall we pray?

Whenever you read your Bible, it's always best to look for two things. One, look for the LORD. And two, look for the main point of the writer.

Here's Paul's main point. Christians should be a whole lot more like geese than gulls. And, in particular, strong Christians are a whole lot more like geese than gulls. Let me show you how.

First, then, strong Christians look after weak Christians; verse one. Romans 15:1 *"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (2) Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. (3) For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.*

Did you notice the repeated word? It's the word "please." Paul uses it three times.

Romans 15:1 *"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to **please** ourselves. (2) Let every one of us **please** his neighbour for his good to edification. (3) For even Christ **pleased** not himself; but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."*

Some of you will probably not recognize this. It's a satire on the greatness of our society. "It is a civilization which has

destroyed the simplicity and repose of life; replaced its contentment, its poetry, its soft romance-dreams and visions with the money-fever, sordid ideals, vulgar ambitions, and the sleep which does not refresh; it has invented a thousand useless luxuries, and turned them into necessities; it has created a thousand vicious appetites and satisfies none of them; it has dethroned God and set up the shekel [materialism] in His place." [Found in "Papers Of The Adam Family" by Mark Twain].

The man that wrote this was Mark Twain; back in 1939; even though it wasn't published until 1962. He's aptly describing what it means to "please ourselves."

Romans fifteen is a lesson on how Christians should relate to each another. It's very possible for a Christian to get to the place where he sees his success as the only success and never concerned about his brother or his sister.

The primary concern here is a word to the strong Christian. Paul is telling the strong Christian to find a way to help the weak Christian. Paul says Romans 15:1 *"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak ..."*

A strong Christian, in patience, finds a way to look after a weak Christian.

Well, what does a strong Christian look like? A strong Christian is the one who daily turns his heart to the LORD. He, then, places his body on the LORD's altar.

Romans 12:1 *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."*

A strong Christian understands that the reasonable thing a Christian does is to bring his body to the LORD with the realization that his body really belongs to his LORD.

And a strong Christian maintains a specific mindset. Romans 12:2 *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye*

transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

It's a daily renewal of the mind. How? By applying the truth of Scripture to both the problems he faces and to the people God brings into his life. And why? So that, by these things, he proves that God's will is good, acceptable (pleasing to God, and perfect.

So, you see, the strong Christian is more than a mere Christian. He goes from the offering of his body to applying Scripture to his personal life to then being able to connect with the Christians around him as though we are all one body, functioning as the Body of Christ in this world.

Pleasing yourself is natural. *Not* pleasing yourself in order to assist a weak Christian is *not* natural. But we do it for their good and for their edification; to build them up.

Verse two says this. Romans 15:2 "*Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.*"

I recently received an email from a missionary I know who described his fellow workers; including his brother-in-law, this way.

"A few years ago my brother-in-law who was one of the directors of CEF in Kerala passed away due to cancer. Before he died, he shared with me something which made me to think again and again. Although the missionaries were promised a certain amount as their allowance, they made it clear that, only if the money was available, would their allowance be sent to them. Several times they had no money to give to the missionaries. But, whatever money *did* come in, he distributed to the missionaries, and took none for himself. Very often he had no money for his own allowance."

My friend Abraham wrote this. "He shared this with me, not to get my sympathy, but he counted it as a privilege to suffer for Christ."

"And," he goes on, "the reason why I'm writing this is to tell you that we have several faith missions under our Church. In one such faith mission which has a few missionaries, all the money that came in was distributed as allowance (meaning, none for the one who oversees the work). Recently two or three of the other leaders didn't get their allowance. Why? Because they had no money after they distributed the money that came in."

Abraham closes with this. "What a privilege to be counted as worthy to suffer for the sake of the gospel. They live with the minimum. No wonder the Lord is blessing that ministry there. I think this is biblical Christianity and missions and part of the true discipleship. Praise His name." Brother Abraham of India.

Everyone here has his own things; everyone here does the things that please themselves; and we have things *we* need and thing *we* want; things that we call our own; things that enable us to enjoy our lives. We could even say that all the things we own are the things which describe what it means to "please ourselves."

Now, who are you looking to as your example? Romans 15:3 "*For even Christ **pleased** not himself; but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.*"

The weak Christian is certainly the one who has a weak conscience and doesn't understand as much as you do. But, he or she is also the one who needs your time and attention.

John Calvin once wrote this about strong Christians. "*They who are strong should spend their labor in assisting the weak, and that they who have made the greatest advances should bear with the more ignorant. For God, by making us stronger than others, does not bestow strength that we may oppress the weak.*" [Found on <https://www.ligonier.org> "The Weak In Faith" by Dr. R. C. Sproull].

Think about all Jesus had; everything is His in Heaven and in earth. And He has all the time there is. Yet, He Who has the most of all has decided to please Himself the least of all.

Here's His example.

- Jesus demonstrated extreme patience towards you, that *"while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).
- He showed unbelievable powers of forgiveness towards you, that while He was hanging on the cross He said *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* (Luke 23:34)
- His love for you has given you a purpose and a reason to rejoice even though we don't deserve it. *"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: (15) And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. (II Corinthians 5:14-15)*
- He never gives up on you *"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."* (Hebrews 12:2-3)
- And He loves you with an everlasting love so that you will never ever be separated from Him. *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (37) Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:35-39) [Adapted from an article

titled "Strong Christians Do This" by J. B. Cachila on <https://www.christiantoday.com>].

First, strong Christians look after weak Christians.

Second, strong Christians are encouragers; verse four.

Romans 15:4 *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and **comfort** of the scriptures might have hope. (5) Now the God of patience and **consolation** grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus..."*

Can you see the word "encourage" here in verse four? It's the Old English "comfort." And it's the same as the word "consolation" in verse five.

Paul is telling us that the Scriptures, the Old Testament, provide at least these two things for you, patience and encouragement. Both of these words, "comfort" and "consolation" mean the same thing; "coming alongside someone and encouraging them."

Can you see the power of your Bible here? The LORD teaches us through the people and through the accounts of the history given in Scripture. These stories were written for your spiritual education. And what can you learn from the Old Testament?

Romans 15:4 *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through **patience and comfort** of the scriptures might have hope. (5) Now the God of patience and **consolation** grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus..."*

Patient endurance with people and encouragement in times of trial; to keep leaning on the LORD no matter what.

Many of us, maybe all of us, have a tendency to keep asking "Why is this happening to me?" I've even had people say this to me "I know this happened to me for reason; I just don't know what."

Well, here's your answer. It's because you are way too-self-centered. Way too much of your life is your life and way too little of your life is Christ's life. You are more concerned about you while the LORD is more concerned about how you are assisting another Christian. And when you discover the Bible showing you how to be patient and encouraging with people, you find a new measure of hope. That's what Paul is saying here.

Romans 15:4 *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (5) Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus..."*

"Whatsoever" covers a whole lot of things, doesn't it? Why is all this happening to me? I'll tell you. It's because God is constantly after your life being a means to strengthening someone else. God is teaching you to trust Him as He taught so many in the Old Testament. And your maturity level is not an increase in knowledge as much as it is in your confidence in God while it is a decrease in your confidence in yourself and the things in this world.

The next time you read through the Old Testament, look for the weaknesses of those who knew the LORD. Consider, for example, the weaknesses of Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and Joshua, and David, and Solomon, and Gideon, and Elijah. Read their lives thoroughly. And watch how the LORD patiently and lovingly develops them into men and women of God.

Folks, to be a Christian is to become a strong Christian, a strong person. And what exactly does a strong Christian do? According to this passage here in Romans, among many other things, a strong Christian lives to strengthen weaker brothers and sisters.

Here's Paul writing to the Hebrews. Hebrews 5:12 *"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles [words] of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."*

(13) For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. (14) But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

"Milk," as you know, is for babies; mostly. "Meat," on the other hand, is for those who are having their spiritual senses trained, exercised in discerning good and evil.

Scripture will exercise you if you'll read and memorize it. It will not and cannot exercise you if you neglect it and refuse to memorize it. And Scripture applied molds you into a stronger Christian.

So, how can you be an encourager to other Christians? Let God do His perfect work of developing you in your relationships to other Christians, especially to those who are weak.

First, strong Christians look after weak Christians.

Second, strong Christians are encouragers.

Third, strong Christians live for the LORD's glory, not their own; verse six. Romans 15:6 *"That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (7) Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."*

Folks, one mind sounds like a very difficult thing. But, the LORD says, that's what He's after; weak with the strong; you with your brother and sister; troubled with the peaceful; challenged with the overcomers; meat-eaters with the vegetable-eaters; those who mow their lawn on Sunday with those who watch NASCAR on Sunday; those you don't like and those who don't like you; all of the limbs of the body

interacting with and dealing with each other and not neglecting each other or the house of the LORD.

And the LORD says that when this is the case, He's glorified. We glorify Him with one mind and with one mouth as we receive each other and build each other up in the faith.

So, here's my question. What will it be from now on, goose or gull?

Let me close with this story from the life of Jesus.

Matthew 12:9 "*And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue: (10) and, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? That they might accuse him. (11) And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?*

(12) How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days. (13) Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. (14) Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

(15) But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; (16) and charged them that they should not make him known: (17) That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

(18) Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. (19) He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

(20) A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. (21) And in his name shall the Gentiles trust."

Let me share with you how one man puts it. "The reed is a slender, frail plant in itself, and therefore a very proper image to represent someone who is weak.

A *bruised* reed is even more frail. It hangs its head. It's not able to stand without a prop of some kind. What an appropriate picture of a person who is weak and in need of assistance. Sometimes he or she is an Unbeliever bowed down and broken under a load of sin and sorrow. He too sinks and is unable to stand without support? *Strength* may bear up under a burden, or struggle with it, until it has thrown it off; but a bruised reed; a picture of a needy soul, for sure. He is weak in himself, and in the meantime crushed under a heavy weight; maybe of guilt and distress.

And what would become of such a frail, bruised reed, if, instead of raising him up and supporting him, Jesus should stand on him and crush him under the foot of his indignation? But though a reed, especially a bruised reed, is an insignificant thing, of little or no use, yet, Matthew tells us, "*a bruised reed he will not break.*" He raises it up with a gentle hand, and enables it to stand, though in itself weak and easily crushed to ruin.

"The Lord Jesus is an Almighty Conqueror. He marches in state through our world; and here and there a bruised reed lies in his way. But instead of disregarding it, or trampling it under foot—he takes care not to break it. He raises up the drooping straw, worthless as it is—and supports it with his gentle hand."

Thus, poor brokenhearted penitents, thus he takes care of the bruised reeds of this world. He does not crush you. Instead, He takes you up, and inspires you with strength, and bears your burden so that you flourish again.

I hope, my dear brethren, some of you, begin already to feel the pleasing energy of this text. Are you not ready to say, "Blessed Jesus! Is this your true character? Then you are just such a Savior as I need, and I most willingly give up myself to you!"

You might be that bruised reed today—a feeble, shattered, useless, thin. Yet, “He will not break the bruised reed.” [Found on <http://www.biblebb.com> “The Compassion of Christ to Weak Believers” by Samuel Davies (1724-1761).

You can come to Him for salvation and forgiveness of all your sins. He paid the full penalty for your sins. And He’s right now ready to completely forgive you of every sin you’ve ever committed. Will you pray this prayer?

“LORD, I admit I am a lost sinner and a bruised reed. I need, not only your strength, but your death. I put my trust in you right now to save my soul. I believe You died on the Cross for my sins. Thank you. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

Or, you might be the strong Christian. Can you not take the example of Jesus and find a weak Christian and go to him or her today and build them up?

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Shall we pray?

Hymn # 63 “All Creatures of Our God and King”