

Romans 14:1-15:13: Disagreeing without Dividing

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Romans / Romans 14:1–15:13

Introduction

- Leading worship at a small church in Bush, Louisiana for a revival. They had an old, upright piano that was out of tune. I led from my keyboard. Asked me to not play my “music box.” An insult to my manhood. Men don’t play music boxes. But... a strong opinion that the piano should have been played instead of my music box.
- How many of you are opinionated? You not only have strong opinions, you have personal preferences and convictions. You have thoughts like, “This is what a good worship service must be like...” Or, “If the church would only (fill in the blank) it would be much more effective. Strong convictions: e.g., Every Christian should be at church every time the doors are open... (Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night.)
- It’s not wrong to have strong opinions, personal preferences, and convictions. It is wrong when we let our opinions, preferences, and convictions divide us. Unfortunately, churches divide over opinions and preferences way too often.
- This is the situation in [Romans 14](#). Paul challenges believers who had different opinions as to how to live out their faith.
- Paul not trying to eliminate their convictions, but he did not want those convictions to divide the church.
- Paul wanted these believers to pursue unity by valuing self-sacrificial love more than they valued their own opinions and preferences. From

this passage, three commitments we must make if we're going to pursue unity over our preferences.

We must accept each other while acknowledging our differences (vs. 1-4).

- vs. 1 - "Welcome anyone who is weak in faith..." Paul writes about weak vs. strong. The weak were genuinely saved believers who thought it was important to observe the religious traditions they grew up with like observing religious festivals and eating kosher. Paul calls them weak because they have yet to grow to understand that the Gospel frees them from being obligated to Old Testament rituals - but that didn't mean they weren't saved. They were family in Christ, and the strong needed to treat them as such.
- The strong were believers who understood that the Gospel frees people from having to observe the religious practices of the Old Testament.
- The weak believers chose a vegetarian diet because in Rome it was hard to get meat that wasn't first sacrificed to an idol. That violated their conscious. For the strong, the idol wasn't a god at all, so no big deal, eat the meat.
- Paul's instruction: (vs. 3) "Don't look down on your brothers and sisters who abstain from meat." We should accept believers who see things differently than we do because God has already accepted them.
- Vs. 4 - "He will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand." The believer you are tempted to criticize is someone God Himself is sustaining.
- Problem: Both weak and strong judging each other. Weak: "Why don't you abstain from meat?" Strong: "Why don't you eat meat?"
- Both groups had strong convictions, and those convictions were dividing them. Each group growing irritated with the other group.

- The issue was not a matter essential for salvation. They agreed on the most important thing: salvation in Christ alone by faith. They weren't debating over the inerrancy of Scripture, issues of gender and marriage, or morality. They were disagreeing over meat. Paul calls it a "debatable" or "disputed" matter. At the end of the day, not a big deal if you eat meat or not. What is a big deal is that you're devoted to Jesus.
- Division often happens when we think everyone should share our opinion and live out our faith like we do. E.g. lots of examples:
 - Should a Christian drink alcohol or be a teetotaler? After all, [Proverbs 20:1](#) - Wine is a mocker. Yet, Jesus turned water into wine. The real question: What's wise?
 - What about dress in church? Sunday best or come as you are?
 - Worship style? Hymn/piano/organ or New music with a band?
 - Public school? Private school? Home school? Can a Christian send their child to public school? Or, what missional opportunities are you missing if you never send your kids to public school.
 - Christians can only vote republican? Christians can't possibly vote democrat?
 - Eschatology? 7 year tribulation or tribulation now?
- Lots of strong opinions. Be careful - not sinful to hold different opinions, but it is sinful to judge or look down on others because they don't share your opinion.
- Your strong opinions are not a sign of spiritual maturity. Your humility and love for fellow believers IS a sign of spiritual maturity.
- **Two diagnostic questions.**
- **Do I find myself more irritated by another believer's behavior than I am grieved by my own sin?**

- **Do I feel the need the need to correct or comment every time another believer does something I wouldn't do?**
- How you answer those two questions reveals if you have a welcoming heart or not.

We must love others more than we exercise our personal freedoms.

- vs. 5 - Paul moves from the issue of eating meat to the issue of religious days. Some Jewish believers observed Jewish festival days while Gentile believers treated every day the same.
- vs. 6 - Paul says both groups were acting with the same motive - they wanted to honor the Lord.
- vs. 7-8 - Both of these groups ultimately belonged to the Lord,. “None of us lives for himself and no one dies for himself.” While these believers held different opinions, they were making decisions based on their understanding of the Lordship of Christ.
- vs. 9-12 - Jesus died and rose again to be the judge of the living and the dead. All are subject to His authority. Again, you're not the judge. Jesus is.
- Paul quotes from [Isaiah 45:23](#) to support his argument. In [Isaiah 45](#), God is speaking about His sovereignty over all nations and all people. The point: There is only one God, and every person is accountable to Him.
- On the day we stand before the judge, we will not answer for the convictions of someone else. We will answer for our own faithfulness to the Lord. Instead of focusing on someone not sharing our opinion on how they should live, focus on how you walk with the Lord.

- When you stop judging people for not holding to your preferences it frees you to actually love and minister to those who might not think like you.
- vs. 13-15 - Paul theologically sided with the strong. But, not in a way that he judged the weak. Instead, he was willing to lay aside his personal freedoms to not be a stumbling block to the weak. Paul agreed with the strong, but he wanted the strong to limit their freedom if their freedom would harm another believer.
- “Do not destroy someone who Christ died for.” Your opinion or personal freedom is never more important than a person Christ died to save. If you are so pushy about your strong personal opinions and convictions that you push someone away from Jesus, that’s a problem.
- vs. 16-18 - The Kingdom of God is not ultimately about if you eat meat or not or if you keep the right religious days, wear the right clothes to church, have the right style of worship, etc. The Kingdom of God is about pursuing righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit.
- We tend to get bogged down over things that are ultimately trivial and we do not spend enough time pursuing what’s most important.
- vs. 19-23 - Paul’s point: Don’t destroy God’s work over minor issues. How many times have you had conflict with other believers over what were really minor issues?
- Paul says don’t tear down God’s work over something as small as food. The spiritual growth of a believer matters far more than proving you are right.
- vs. 22 - Sometimes it’s best to keep your strong opinions to yourself. You may be right, but the way you communicate your opinion could cause a lot of damage. Let the Lord do His work.

- vs. 22b-23 - If the weak believed eating meat would dishonor the Lord, then eating it would be sin for them even if the meat itself was not sinful. Because they would be acting against their conscience before God.
- **Just because other believers have different opinions than you doesn't mean they love Jesus less than you.** We might disagree on a host of things. How Christians should raise their kids. What kind of media we choose to consume. What type of dress is more reverent in church, etc. BUT... you can't assume that because someone doesn't hold your opinion that they love Jesus less than you.
- **Just because you're convinced you're correct doesn't give you the right to elevate your personal preferences and convictions to commands.** You might think it's ok to have a glass of wine every night. That's fine. I don't think it's wise for me. Therefore, you don't have to try to convince me. We can agree to disagree. Be careful of phrases like, "You just needed to loosen up." Or, "You're too dogmatic." Or, "You're just too much of a rule follower."
- We preach the primary doctrines of the faith, and we defend the essentials of the faith with our lives. But, we give lots of grace and charity in those areas that are matters of opinion and personal conviction.

We must bear with each other instead of trying to prove each other wrong.

- We're so combative. We love to prove people wrong. We love to win arguments or to get people to think like us. We love to please ourselves.
- If you consider yourself spiritually strong, the spiritually strong thing to do isn't to try to win an argument, it's to bear the weaknesses of others. It's not build up our neighbor. Instead, please your neighbor for his good, build him up (vs. 2).

- Think about Jesus. He didn't come to simply win an argument. Nor did He come to please Himself. He came to do the will of His Father by bearing our weaknesses even when that meant enduring the insults of the very people He came to save (Paul quotes [Psalm 69:9](#)). Psalm written by David in his own suffering, but it's a Psalm that points to Jesus. First part of [Ps. 69:9](#): "Zeal for your house has consumed me..."
- Zeal for the Father's will consumed Jesus to the point that He was willing to come and die and rise again for you so you might be united to Him and His people.
- vs. 4 - Whatever written in the past was written for our instruction. Paul's talking about the Old Testament.
- Paul quotes four OT passages that tell of the Gentiles coming into the family of God. He quotes [2 Samuel 22:50](#), [Deuteronomy 32:43](#), [Psalm 117:1](#), and [Isaiah 11:10](#).
- Paul quotes from all three major sections of the Hebrew Scripture (The Law, The Writings, and The Prophets) to testify to the truth that God has brought together people from very different backgrounds (Jew and Gentile) to be a part of His forever family.
- Gentiles worshipping God alongside of Israel was always God's plan.
- If God intended for us to glorify Him together in spite of our differences, then we must learn to live together in spite of our differences.
- Vs. 7 - Paul returns to what he wrote in [Romans 14:1](#). "Welcome one another."
- A challenging chapter that's calling us to bear with one another. Reality - some of us in this room are more spiritually mature than others. How do we bear with other?
- **Encourage more than criticize.** Who needs your encouragement? Or, who have you criticized recently that you should encourage instead?

- **Invest more than you try to win.** You want to win the argument, but what's far more powerful is winning a friendship that you can invest in for the sake of the Gospel. Is there anyone you're investing in right now to help them grow in Jesus?
- **Push others towards what really matters.** NOT the embracing of each other's opinions, but Jesus, who came to reconcile us to Himself and each other through His death and resurrection. This morning, if you don't have a relationship with Jesus, turn from your sins and trust in Him.
- For those of us who are followers of Jesus, it's so important that we push each other to grow the fruit of the Spirit and Christlike character. That's FAR MORE important than all of us agreeing on what we should wear to church or what kind of musical style we should sing or who we should vote for as Christians. Pushing each other to live on the mission of God is FAR MORE important than us all agreeing on whether home schooling or public schooling is the best option for our children.