

Show consideration for the weak, and build one another up!

Lesson Six +++ Romans 14:1 – 15:13

INTRODUCTION

- A. “Why did Jesus die on the cross?” “Did Jesus really rise from the dead, and what does that mean for us?” “What do we receive in the Lord’s Supper?” “What is prayer, and who has the right to do it?”
- Sometimes Christians disagree over how to answer questions like these. What must they do to make sure they have the correct answers?
- B. “How should we use the offerings that we gather?” “What clothing shall our preacher wear?” “What musical instruments will accompany our hymns?” “What color should we paint the room where we worship?”
- Sometimes Christians disagree over how to answer questions like these. When they learn that the Bible does not provide specific guidelines, what will they do?
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Introduction: In this chapter Paul is not writing about believers and unbelievers. Instead he is writing to the saints about what the saints are to do. In particular, Paul is teaching mature believers to show loving consideration for less mature believers.

14:1-4

1. A “disputable matter” occurs when Scripture does not settle a decision one way or another. At such times someone whose faith in some respects is weak (or immature) may insist that his opinion about that “disputable matter” is the correct one.
 - Instead of getting into a quarrel, what does Paul say the stronger (more mature) believer should do?
- accept them, Paul says. Do not merely tolerate them, embrace them, treat them as a brother or sister in Christ.
2. The FIRST example of a “disputable matter” at Rome = What a Christian will decide to eat.
 - **Background:** For many centuries the Jews had lived under God’s ceremonial laws. Those laws commanded that some foods (like pork) were “unclean” and therefore not to be eaten. When Jesus Christ finished his work, those laws were no longer in force. Read Colossians 2:16-17.
 - Yet some of the Jewish Christians struggled with their new freedom. They still refused to eat pork.
 - a. According to v 3, why should the Christian with a strong faith (“I have the right to eat anything!”) not belittle or despise the person who ate only vegetables?
 - b. Also according to v 3, why should the Christian with a weak faith not condemn the Christian who ate everything available (“He is going to hell because he eats pork!”)?
- answer for both a. and b. = God has accepted them
- “must not look down on him...” literally, ‘must not belittle him’, or “view him as nothing”. A Christian who lives in view of God’s mercy will never have such an attitude.

3. v 4 In ancient Rome many households had servants. It would have been foolish to tell the master of another house, “You have a terrible servant. He does not keep your floors clean or prepare good meals for you.” Better to mind your own business. Let the master himself decide whether his servant stands approved or not.

- The point: Every believer has the Lord Jesus as his Master. If the Lord has announced that one of his servants stands approved, Paul asks, “Who are you to judge [that servant]?”

Luther picks up this thought in his lecture: Here he faces them (who judge and despise) with the judgment seat of Christ. There we all must be judged. See, with what great threats he deters us from despising one another and especially the weak. He uses every argument against this, namely, God, man (human laws), Christ’s suffering, reign, and last judgment. He deters us from judging by emphasizing the divine judgment. He means to say: It is foolish to judge those who will be judged by Christ. But also be careful in order that you who judge may not be judged yourself (by God).

- On what basis has the Lord announced that all of his servants stand approved?

- because the Lord is able to make him stand

- On what basis has God been able to make his servants stand approved?

Not on the basis of how well I have worked for my Master, but on the basis on how perfectly my Savior worked as a servant for the Master. Go back to the previous chapter 13:14, “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus.” That has already happened to me through holy baptism. God the Father sees Christ and his works and makes me stand approved because Christ stands approved, “This is my Son whom I love. With him I am well-pleased.”

We will have the privilege of standing before the Lamb who was slain for all eternity because of the fine linens we will wear, which stand for the righteous declaration made upon us for his sake!

14:5-8

1. The SECOND example of a “disputable matter” at Rome = Holy days.

- Background: Again, the Jews had lived for centuries under God’s ceremonial laws. According to those laws the seventh day of the week was to be the Sabbath, a day of rest that was “holy to the Lord” (Ex 31:15). When Christ finished his work, however, the Sabbath laws were no longer in effect. Again see Colossians 2:16-17.
- Some of the Jewish Christians struggled with their new freedom. They still felt that Saturday was holier than the other six days of the week.

2. v 5 “Each one should be filled with certainty in his own mind.” What should each be certain about? Notice how v 6 explains.

- *“be fully convinced, assured; be filled with certainty”*

o Not “should,” but rather an imperative, “Let him be filled with certainty.”

- *Both the weak and the strong need to go to the Word again and again for clarification.*
- *As opposed to being forced into the preference of the majority or of the most vehement ones or simply following a tradition.*

- What “he is certain about” is that what he is doing is for the Lord, or to the honor and glory of the Lord. Notice how many times Paul repeats that phrase here in these verses...

- Looking at the Greek: κυρίῳ appears three times in this verse. This is a dative of advantage that refers to Christ. Translate: “for the Lord” or “to the honor of the Lord.”
3. Later in this chapter Paul will write about the opposite to such certainty: Eating certain foods while doubting whether that is the right thing to do.
- Rom14:23 -- “But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.”
4. Evaluate: Even if two Christians disagree about observing holy days or eating only vegetables, these two persons are alike.
- *The point Paul is making at the end of each phrase in vs6 is that everything we do as Christians is done not for my glory or to bring attention to what I’m doing, but that it is done to glorify and praise God and bring attention to him. This is a wonderful application of the truth that the Apostle established in chapter 6. We died with Christ. We have been raised with Christ. Why would we selfishly live for ourselves? You’ve been set free from sin and have become slaves to God and to righteousness. This follows Paul’s exhortation in chapter 12, “In view of God’s mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.” As long as both are doing so to “give thanks to God” as Paul says, then yes, they are both alike, even though they disagree.*
5. No believer can claim that what he does is for his own benefit alone (v 7). Instead each believer lives and dies to the honor of the Lord and belonging to him (v8).
- How does v 8 comfort the believer?
 - *I belong to the Lord even in death. I do not belong to death or to the grave.*
 - *I have nothing to lose and everything to gain because I belong to my Savior Jesus and he belongs to me. Christ Jesus has brought me into a relationship where he has given me everything that I need - forgiveness, eternal life, salvation from hell and Satan, resurrection from the dead, and the faith to believe it. I will live my life to thank and glorify him. When I die, I will die confident, knowing that I still belong to him, knowing that my death will glorify him, because then all of his promises will come to their fulfillment and I will belong to him forever in heaven.*
 - How does v 8 admonish the believer?
 - *Sometimes I selfishly live for me... too many times in my pride I live for me. When I think about death, there are times that I am afraid. But I have no reason to be afraid, because I belong to Jesus, who died and came back alive. He will do the same for me.*

14:9-13

1. Looking at the Greek:
 - Paul begins this verse with an explanatory γὰρ = “Indeed!” He is making his point emphatically!
2. Evaluate: Christ is the Lord of the saints on earth (“the living ones”) and of the saints already in heaven (“the dead ones”). If every believer kept this in mind, there would be no hurtful arguments, belittling comments, or quiet resentment about “adiaphora” (matters which the Lord neither commands nor forbids).
 - *2 Co 5:15 -- “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”*
3. Paul urges the Romans not to pass judgment on each other in regard to “disputable matters” (adiaphora).
 - Why does he then mention (in v 10) that someday we will all stand before God’s judgment seat? See v 12.
 - *“Paul may be warning the believers that they stand in danger of suffering God’s judgment for their sinful criticism of one another. But, in light of vv 7-9, we think it is more likely that he is reminding them that it is God, and not other Christians, to whom each believer is answerable.”*
 - Looking through vv 9-12, what is the account that people on both sides of a “disputable matter” will give to God?
 - *The primary point: Ultimately it is God, and not human beings, to whom each individual is answerable.*
 - *Another implication: Do not judge your brother and thus sin yourself, for God will judge you for your sin.*

14:1-12 MAJOR POINT: When believers disagree about a matter that the Bible does not settle, the first thing God tells us to do is to

Discussion:

1. List some of the “disputable matters” that we face together as a congregation.
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2. Which of these practices that you listed could potentially become sinful?

3. What if a fellow believer is doing one of these things in a way that is not sinful, but you still do not feel you can join with him? What does St. Paul tell you that you should do or not do?
 - *For application:* Each of the items listed are things that the Bible neither commands nor condemns. What they also have in common is that each has a “history” in a number of WELS congregations. Each generation will have its own discussions of adiaphora.
 - a) beginning and closing a worship service with a procession carrying a cross
 - b) card playing
 - c) drinking an alcoholic beverage
 - d) rites of initiation into a group
 - e) joining hands when praying as a group
 - f) square dancing
 - g) playing guitars in the chancel during a Sunday morning worship service
 - h) speaking the Lord’s Prayer using the wording of the KJV vs. NIV84
 - *Notes:*
 - There is a significant difference between “I don’t like it” and “I think it’s wrong.”
 - Recognize that there may be several such situations in your congregation and that they are often emotional.

Background for vv 13-18: For many years the apostles had taught that the work of Christ brought an end to the Jewish ceremonial laws. At an intellectual level, the “weak” (less mature) Christians at Rome may have understood this. Yet this new freedom ran counter to long held beliefs. Some of them still felt in their hearts that they were doing wrong by eating certain foods, for instance.

14:13-18

1. Looking at the Greek:
 - In v 13 Paul says, “But make this decision instead, not to place an obstacle (πρόσκομμα, tripping matter) or a trap (σκάνδαλον, stumbling matter) before your brother.”
2. v 14 If a believer thinks that a certain activity is wrong -- even if God’s Word does not forbid it! -- then for him to do it is sinful. Why? Read verse 23.
 - *because it does not come from faith*
3. The last portion of v 15 raises the stakes! The behavior of the “strong” believer who exercises his freedom can bring terrible spiritual harm and distress to the “weak” believer. If the “weak” believer violates his conscience, he may even turn away from the Lord Jesus. Then he will be condemned to hell for his unbelief!
 - Note: Jesus Christ paid the supreme price for that “weak” Christian. For the sake of the “weak,” how can the “strong” refuse to pay the insignificant price of restricting what they eat?!
 - See also Rom 14:20,23 and 1 Cor 8:9-11.

4. Better translation of v 16: “So do not let the good thing you have become a matter of blasphemy.”
 - In other words, “strong” believers, don’t let your exercise of what you know is a good thing give someone else an occasion to speak evil against the gospel of the kingdom.
 - *What’s meant by this? NIV84, ESV, and HCSB seem to be pointing to that “good” freedom that you have. Schreiner (739-740) convincingly explains, however, that the very next verse identifies “that good thing you have” as the gospel of the kingdom.*
 - *What Schreiner presents fits, doesn’t it? One’s exercise of freedom is unlikely to be “slandered.” But an inconsiderate exercise of freedom may give someone else an excuse to blaspheme the gospel of the kingdom. Schreiner points to a somewhat similar lament at Rom 2:24, where Gentiles reviled God’s name because of the ungodly conduct of the Jews.*

5. Some of the “weak” at Rome also refused to drink wine. Possibly they were concerned that the wine had been contaminated by being associated with pagan temple practices.
 - What does Paul’s description of God’s kingdom have to do with his point here in v 17?
 - *Paraphrase: Dear “strong” Christians, do not by your insisting on freedom prompt those who are spiritually harmed by your behavior to revile the gospel of the kingdom.*

6. Looking at the Greek:
 - Once again v 18 begins with an explanatory γὰρ = “Indeed!” Paul is explaining that the person who serves God by restricting his freedom for the sake of a “weak” believer is doing something pleasing to God and to other people.

14:19-23

1. According to v 19, what is more important than exercising your Christian freedoms? And according to v 21, what is worse than not eating certain meats or drinking wine?
 - *vs19 doing whatever leads to peace and mutual edification*
 - *vs21 causing a brother or sister in Christ to fall from faith*

2. Looking at the Greek:
 - v 20b, “Indeed all things are clean. Nevertheless it is wrong for the man who eats while someone else is stumbling (διὰ προσκόμματος).”
 - v 22a, “As for you, the belief that you have, keep it to yourself (κατὰ σεαυτὸν) before God.” In other words, as far as his belief about a “disputable matter” is concerned, a “strong” believer should not boast about it or flaunt it or start arguments with it. He will keep quiet about it and find satisfaction in the fact that God sees his faith in the Gospel that gives him such freedoms.

3. In a “disputable matter” there are two sides. There are the “strong” ones who recognize their freedom and want to exercise it, and there are the “weak” ones who are reluctant to exercise their freedom.
 - By the end of v 23 one point is very clear: *Both sides must carefully consider what they say and do.*

- Note: Those who are leaders in the church will imitate St. Paul here. When disputes over adiaphora arise in a congregation, the leaders will shepherd *both* sides of the matter.

- *Translate: "But the one who keeps doubting stands completely condemned if he should eat, because [it (what he does) is] not from conviction. Indeed everything which is not from conviction is sin."*

- *This sin then is "any act that does not match our sincerely held convictions about what our Christian faith allows us to do and prohibits us from doing"*

14:13-23 MAJOR POINT: When believers disagree about a matter that the Bible does not settle, the second thing God tells us to do is to

15:1-6

1. The "strong" believer who fully understands his freedoms in Christ makes decisions:
 - (15:1) not to please ...
 - (15:2) rather to please ...
 - (14:18) and also to please ...
 - (15:3) as he imitates ...
2. It is very obvious in these chapters that some believers are "strong" (more mature) while other believers are "weak" (less mature). The minister of the Gospel must often "bear with the weakness of those who are not strong" (v 1).
 - At the same time he is never satisfied that some of his sheep are not strong. He will preach and teach the Word of God, confident that "all Scripture is ... useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).

- *remember that this all goes back to Romans 12:1 – in view of God's mercy...*

3. How does Christ's action (see the quote from Ps 69 in v 3) serve as example for the strong to follow in matters of adiaphora?
 - *Paul is teaching the "capable" that putting up with the weaknesses of others is quite compatible with their "strength" in the Lord. After all, even the mighty Christ did not please himself.*
 - *It's not necessarily that "the strong" have been hearing insults from others. Instead Paul is simply pointing to Jesus' supreme example of unselfish service.*
 - *NT writers often apply the language of Psalm 69 (here 69:9b) to the passion of Jesus. Here, then, Paul is showing Christ as a model to imitate.*
 - *Chrysostom: "He had power not to have been reproached, power not to have suffered what he did suffer, had he been minded to look to his own things."*
 - *This verse puts the "suffering" of the "strong" in perspective. Occasionally abstaining from meat or wine or observing a special religious day is not much of a burden compared to what Christ was willing to suffer for their sake.*

- *And....It's not much of a burden when it is rooted in love, like Christ's actions were.*
- *And again, our motivation for vs1-3 goes back to 12:1, "in view of God's mercy..."*

4. Consider memorizing Rom 15:4.

- Why does Paul remind us of what was written in the past?

Just as the NT era Christians could learn from what was written in the OT, now we today learn from both the OT Scriptures and what was written in the NT. In fact, in such practical sections of Scripture where Paul talks about learning from the past like here and 1 Corinthians 10--these are some of the best places for us to make vivid connections and learn from both the OT and the NT at the same time.

My encouragement to bear with the failings of the weak, to build up the body of believers comes from the Scriptures. The ability to persevere comes from the power of the promises of God found in the Scriptures.

- What is the hope that unites all believers, whether they are "weak" or "strong" and even if they disagree on "disputable matters"?

- the hope, or certainty, of eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus

Constantly keeping the goal of heaven in front of me puts vs.1-3 into perspective. All of my brothers and sisters have the same goal of their faith. By my actions I will want to build them up and do what pleases them so that they are encouraged to keep that same goal before them.

Just as they did for our brothers and sisters of the past, the Scriptures sustain our staying power and provide encouragement for us as they center our hopes in the coming Christ.

5. In vv 5-6 Paul is *not* saying that believers will always think the same way about "disputable matters." Instead what is the unity he prays for?

- *Paul is referring to the unity of faith and doctrine and confession - that's what matters as far as unity in the church goes. The context supports this in the last half of this verse and the following verse. Our unity is based on what is in line with Christ. The result is that we glorify God with one unity voice and heart - the whole body and soul united with other bodies and souls that confess and believe the same truths, which are founded on Christ.*
- *Paul is pushing more that people "be on the same page with each other" rather than "do the same as each other," and the way to "be on the same page with each other" is to think the same things with regards to Christ.*
- *The members of my synod may not have the same opinion about the best English Bible translation or the same practice as far as what percentage of offerings should be used for away-from-this-location "mission" purposes. Nevertheless God may and does grant us the same mindset in regard to the commands and promises of God.*

6. Go back to v4. Where does the encouragement toward Christian unity come from?

- the Scriptures

15:7-12

1. Paul began chapter 14 with the same command (προσλαμβάνεσθε) that he uses here at the start of 15:7. His command is to “welcome” or “embrace” or “receive into your circle,” just as a brother would receive a brother.
 - Back in 14:1 Paul was urging the strong believers to receive the weak into their circle. What sort of acceptance is he urging here? (See vv 8-9.)
 - Paul began chapter 14 with the same imperative, meaning “welcome; receive into one’s circle; embrace” one another as brothers and sisters would receive one another.
 - *Back in 14:1 Paul was urging the “strong” believers to accept the “weak.” Here he exhorts every believer to accept every other believer. Paul has two reasons for this:*
 - a) *Christ has accepted them (7b); and*
 - b) *Christ has acted to bring God’s blessing to both Jews (8) and Gentiles (9a), in fulfillment of the Scriptures (9b-12).*
2. Many of the “disputable matters” that threatened to divide the church at Rome were cultural, with the “strong” Gentile Christians exercising their freedoms and looking down on the “weak” Jewish Christians. We are reminded of chapter 11, where Paul pointed out that the “grafted-in branches” were an important addition the church but that they should not become arrogant over against the Jews.
 - How can vv 7-12 be applied to a Christian congregation today?
3. v 13 Paul’s prayer is for both the “strong” and the “weak” -- for both the Gentiles and the Jews in the church at Rome.
 - How does the fact that God fills us with joy and peace cause us to “overflow with hope”?

15:1-13 MAJOR POINT: When we live and serve with our brothers and sisters in the church, what is much more important than pleasing ourselves?