

Stronger Together 1

Same Team

Romans 14:1-12

Memory Verses: Romans 14:10

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

(Wearing hat) There are very few things that can rally people to a cause. One that still can is sports! I've never seen anything else like it. You can take 50,000 people from all different backgrounds, careers, and walks of life, and put them together in an arena, they instantly become family. I've never hi-fived or hugged more strangers in my life than at a Carolina Panther's game.

But the church can be the exact opposite. We have the same father, same savior, same spirit, same Gospel, same mission, same destination, same songs, same values, and on and on... and yet sometimes we feel like anything but family. Instead of rallying around what should unite us, we spend our energy arguing over incidental things. How did we get so good at noticing everything that's wrong instead of celebrating everything that's right!

This year we've been going through the book of Romans asking a very simple question... "what does it mean to be a Christian?" What does it look like to follow Christ? And when we boil it down it's simple... leverage your life for the Gospel. Take what God has given you and use it for his glory and kingdom!

So far we've seen just how far we've fallen short in our sin. We've seen how far Christ had to reach down to save us. We've seen that though we are far from perfect, we are chosen in Him to be his people. And because of all of this, we've answered the call to lay down our lives as sacrifices for his cause.

And now we come to chapters 14 and 15 where Paul turns our attention to the fellowship of believers! We can't do this alone! We need the church, we need one another, we need someone to mentor and someone to mentor us! We need spiritual friendship, meaningful fellowship, and accountability. We need teachers and pastors and leaders. We need a family, a body, a community! In short, we are stronger together!

But there is an issue! Sometimes the church has a hard time understanding that they are on the same team! Let's see what Paul has to say about this in **Romans 14:1-12**.

What's he talking about here? Opinions. I've heard opinions are like buttholes. Everyone has one and they all stink! Opinions are divisive and confrontational. If you hold to an opinion and your friend holds to a

different opinion, the ground becomes very fertile, very quickly, for an argument or fight! Opinions are the seeds and bedrock for confrontation. In the church, opinions can quickly become grounds for disunity. It can get rough!

And so, our struggle in these situations is practical. How can we learn to disagree with one another and still love one another in Christ? How can we both believe the same Bible and disagree about things in the Bible? How can we both love the Gospel and disagree about how to share it? How can we both follow Jesus and at times disagree about how to follow him? How can we disagree and remain on the same team? The main point this morning is simple... **Our differences shouldn't divide us when the Gospel has united us.** This morning we are going to see three ways we can protect the unity of the team when we don't see eye to eye.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

First... **We Must Not Confuse Difference With Disunity.** In **Romans 14:1-4** Paul is addressing two groups of people. The weaker brother and the stronger brother. The weaker brother abstains from a lot of morally questionable things. The stronger brother seems to partake of some of those morally questionable things. The weaker brother has very strong convictions about certain morally questionable things. The stronger brother doesn't hold to those same convictions but feels a certain Christian liberty.

Now, let us understand three things here as we get into this topic. First, please note that we are not talking about clearly defined moral sins. There are clearly defined sins in the Bible and we are commanded to stay far far away from them. We should not even have the appearance of evil. But the Bible tends to give us a lot of leeway or liberty on a great many things in which it doesn't directly command us to abstain from. Many of us may refer to these as grey areas. Not black or white... but grey.

Secondly, It is interesting that the church, in the south particularly, has seemed to honor those who abstain of more things and shame those who partake of more things. We look at the one who abstains more as one who is the Stronger brother... he has stronger convictions and stronger self control. We look at the one who doesn't abstain as a rebel who is trying to get as close to the line as possible without going over it. He clearly is weak in his morals and convictions.

But this is not what the Bible says! Why? Because of what Paul teaches us in **1 Corinthians 8:6-7**. The stronger brother is strong because he knows that "All things that are not sinful, are from God and are gifts for us to partake responsibly." Just because they can be used for sinful things doesn't mean we shouldn't still accept them as gifts from God and partake of them responsibly. The weaker brother doesn't "know" this. The weaker brother is not willing to accept these gifts because they feel that they are too weak to use them responsibly. They may even claim... how can it be a gift

from God if it can be abused? Because of this, Paul says they are weak in the faith. Meaning they are not spiritually mature enough to understand or accept these things.

Third, Paul calls these things opinions. The KJV translates these as doubtful disputations. Doubtful as inwardly uncertain. Disputations as divisive. The most accurate translation should be personal opinions that can be divisive. So in truth, we are not just dealing with questionably moral issues, but any opinion that we may hold to that could become divisive. Which in our day, could literally be any opinion. In short, we are not to argue over personal preferences or non-defined moral behavior.

An unhealthy church is one that is overrun with opinions and judgemental attitudes.

So Paul gives us an example so we can understand how this should work. In Paul's day they would sacrifice animals to false pagan gods like Zeus or Athena and then the left over meat would then be sold in the market to the regular people. Then after church first Baptist of Rome would let out and some of the people would go to Walmart and buy some steak. Word got out and some people in the church had a problem with this. They said, we don't eat that meat... it was sacrificed to idols. In fact, since that is the only meat available... we only eat vegetables. If you want to be godly like us you should only eat vegetables too! The steak eaters were like... nah, we're good. We don't see this as idol steak... we see this as God given steak and we thank him for it. The veggie eaters were like... okay, well we are going to tell everyone that you are okay being sinners then! Next Sunday at First Baptist Rome the steak eaters sat on the left and the veggie eaters sat on the right. The steak eaters were despising the veggie eaters for being petty. The veggie eaters were judging the steak eaters for being sinful. So Paul said... okay, some of you are weak brothers in this issue and some of you are strong brothers in this issue... but guess what... we are still brothers! So stop. If you are a brother or sister in Christ... guess what... you are welcomed in by God!

You are saved by his grace! If God welcomes us in, why can't we welcome each other in. And if God is our father then he is the judge. Let him judge. Stay out of it! If they are sinful they will fall, but if they are without sin God will uphold them! Guys, we are not to judge one another in matters that are not clearly defined by scripture. These opinions and liberties are what make us unique in the body of Christ. And so, we are supposed to be unified in Christ. But we are not supposed to be uniform in our opinions. **In unity we give God all the glory, in personal preferences we give grace. Our differences shouldn't divide us when the Gospel has united us.**

Second... **We Must Not Make Our Conviction Everyone Else's Command.** In **Romans 14:5-9** Paul says each one of us should be fully

convinced in our own minds. Meaning... if we are convinced that something is sinful... then that is our personal conviction and therefore we must stick to it! But it doesn't mean that you should force others to share your convictions.

Paul again gives us another illustration. There are people who think some days are more important than other days. For example... the early church was struggling over what day they should worship on. What day should be their sabbath. Should it still be Saturday or should it be Sunday. Or what about festivals and holidays. The Jews has a lot of those. Should we still observe them or not? What about Christmas, Easter, and Halloween? Can they mean something to the pagans and something different to the believers?

For the early church, many had strong convictions about these things... others didn't. But Paul is making it clear... 1) Make sure its your true conviction and stick to it personally. 2) Don't try to force anyone else to stick to it! Why? Because a mature believer who abstains... abstains for the Lord. And a mature believer who partakes... partakes for the Lord. If its all for the Lord, who are you to stop it or condemn it?

And there is a much bigger issue here at stake. The church is the light of the world and a city on a hill. If we are to show the glory of God to the community he has called us to... how can we do that if we are fighting among ourselves. A healthy church has many different people with different opinions all pulling in the same direction. We live for the lord and we die for the Lord! Because Christ lived and died for us! There are souls at stake! **Keep focused on the lost and stop fighting about things of lesser importance! Our differences shouldn't divide us when the Gospel has united us.**

Third... **We Must Remember Whose Judgment Matters.** In **Romans 14:10-12** Paul brings the hammer down. Why do you pass judgment on each other? Why are you feeling a certain way about them when they've done nothing legitimately wrong except hold to a different opinion or way of doing things? Cause... one day we will all stand before the judgment seat of God and give our account! Get this... you don't have to keep score, or be the church hall monitor, or expose everybody, or correct everything, or win every argument! You don't have to be the Holy Spirit! Cause you aren't! You aren't God! Bottom line is this... when you judge everyone for holding to a different opinion, preference, conviction, or way of doing things.... you are guilty of not trusting God to handle it and despising your brother! Ultimately you will be the cause of disunity in the church. So what do you do? You give it to God in prayer. You bond with those you disagree with by focusing on what you do agree on. You pray for peace and unity. And you have mature conversations with one another and agree to disagree on the non-essentials. **Our differences shouldn't divide us**

when the Gospel has united us.

Application

The bottom line is this. Romans 14 isn't telling you to stop believing truth. It's telling you to stop treating every disagreement like a Gospel emergency. There are things worth fighting for like the deity of Christ, the resurrection, the Gospel, the authority of scripture, salvation by grace. These are not Romans 14 issues. Romans 14 is about where we believe differently and how to still be completely unified in Christ through it! If we aren't careful, we can spend all of our energy fighting people who are standing beside us instead of fighting the real enemy! We are on the same team! **Don't spend your energy fighting your family when you're supposed to be fighting the enemy.**

Conclusion

The Apollo 13 crew was notorious for not getting along. They were all Alphas trying to lead the pack. Each one was a veteran astronaut and had their own special way of doing things. For this reason many didn't think they should all be on the same mission. So when there was an explosion on their ship you would think things would have gone all kinds of sideways. But in that moment they found a way to put aside their preferences and opinions and work together to get home! We are all going to disagree at times, that's human nature, but when the mission becomes bigger than our differences, we have to stop asking who is right and start working together no matter what! Guys, we have a huge mission and if we aren't on the same team... we can't accomplish it! **Our differences shouldn't divide us when the Gospel has united us.**