

In View of God's Mercy - Week 15

Romans 14:1-15:13

Pastor Matt Dean

Series Context - After building a solid foundation on what it means to be saved by grace through faith alone in Jesus, Paul is helping the church understand what maturity and unity can look like for Jesus followers from different backgrounds. Last week, we looked at how Christians are to fulfill the law through loving one another and what it looks like to honor governing authorities. Today, we are looking at three more ways we are to live in harmony with one another for the glory of God.

- 14:1-12 The Church is instructed not to pass judgment on one another
- 14:13-23 Christians are instructed towards mutual consideration and not causing another to stumble
- 15:1-13 A clear reminder to consider the example of Christ when we need encouragement, hope, and joy.

Michael Bird, an Australian theologian makes these observation about levels of belief in the Christian church:

1. Matters essential for salvation
 - a. Doctrine of Christ, way of salvation by grace through faith,
2. Matters that are important to the faith, but not necessarily essential for salvation
 - a. Inerrancy of the Bible, matters of morality, marriage, relationships

These are matters that are clear in Scripture and worth dividing over because the integrity of the Church is related to these issues. Then a third level of issues is below those...

3. Matters of indifference / "disputed matters"
 - a. Issues like modesty, how to educate children, how we are to vote, how the end times will unfold, Christian liberty with alcohol, tobacco, food, etc.

Romans context: Rome was known for its many temples where idols would be worshiped, where food, including meat would be offered to idols for "blessing" - Jewish Christians in Rome were concerned that to eat such meat offered to an idol was the equivalent of idol worship – and one more layer to this, would be that some of the meat offered to idols was pork which Jewish people considered unclean; other Christians in Rome from non-Jewish backgrounds had a sense of freedom with this because they recognized that those idols weren't truly God – so there was a blend of Christians when it came to freedom with food. Some were eating meat in freedom, others were so convinced they would only eat vegetables. This seems trivial perhaps, but it was a huge issue that was straining relationships.

"The NT speaks of three types of freedom: 1) *Freedom from the condemnation of God* (cf. [Rom 8:1](#)); 2) *Freedom from the compulsion to sin* (cf. [Rom 6:14](#)); and 3) *Freedom from the conscience of other Christians*. Paul is concerned with the third form of freedom. There are a number of issues on which the Bible does not provide an explicit "yes" or "no". They are issues

that do not affect our acceptance with God, i.e., they do not pertain to whether or not one is a Christian. They are what we might call *secondary*, as over against *primary*, issues. These are matters of conscience. They fall within the domain of Christian liberty. They are issues on which the Bible is silent. Unfortunately, some Christians insist on elevating their opinion on such matters to the status of divine law. They feel compelled to impose their convictions regarding the moral status of such practices on the conscience of other believers.”

Sam Storms

Do Not Pass Judgment on One Another

14 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹ for it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”

¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Stott concludes: "So if we are trying to picture a weaker brother or sister, we must not envisage a vulnerable Christian easily overcome by temptation, but a sensitive Christian full of indecision and scruples. What the weak lack is not strength of self-control but liberty of conscience" (355).

- Be convinced in your own mind / conscience
- Eat / abstain / live unto the Lord
- Be humble / don't pass judgment on to your brother on disputable matters
- Think – is this my whole-life response to Jesus?

Do Not Cause Another to Stumble

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. ¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. ²² The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. ²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

- Instead of passing judgment / don't put a stumbling block in the way of a brother
- Paul recognizes the freedom we have in Christ
- The kingdom of God is not about what we eat or drink (or don't eat or don't drink) but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit
- Let us pursue what makes for peace and mutual encouragement

D.L. Moody went to London to meet Spurgeon, whom he had admired from a distance and considered to be his professional mentor. However, when Spurgeon answered the door with a cigar in his mouth, Moody fell down the stairs in shock. "How could you, a man of God, smoke that?" protested the great American evangelist. Spurgeon took the stogie out of his mouth and walked down the steps to where Moody was still standing in bewilderment. Putting his finger on Moody's rather rotund stomach, he smiled and said, "The same way you, a man of God, could be that fat!"

John Wesley, founding father of Methodism, became a tea-totaller in 1746, after observing that the nerves of the the London poor were "all unstrung, bodily Strength quite decayed". As an alternative beverage, he recommended "small" (weak) beer – and then later in life changed his mind.

- Honor one another / be considerate / aim for our greater joy in Jesus
- This includes how as Christians part of love is limiting our freedoms – it doesn't mean you aren't free, but it does mean there are situations where for the sake of fellow Christians you limit your freedoms.

The Example of Christ

15 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³ For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." ⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

- Having strength and maturity in Christ is SO THAT we are able build others up

“Our pursuit must not be “external conformity” but Christ-centered unity. And in all things, let the church be known for charity, for love. It’s easy to fall into the trap of rejecting fellow believers because they don’t take on your cultural practices. A mark of God’s love is that we welcome and build up other believers—despite their differences of opinions on non-essentials.”
Tony Merida

⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

15:7 “welcome” = *gk proslambano* “Accept.” The word *accept*, which is critical to the whole passage because it starts ch. 14 and ends the passage in Rom 15:7, is the word *proslambano*. It’s a Greek word that means to welcome someone in, in other words, to adjust your life and make changes in order to have a relationship with someone who is culturally or in beliefs, very different than you. (Keller)

- Picture: life together in such harmony with Jesus and one another, that together with one voice we are able to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – thus, we are to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us – for the glory of God. Another way to say this: KEEP THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING. Be most about Jesus.

Christ the Hope of Jews and Gentiles

⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” ¹⁰ And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” ¹¹ And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.” ¹² And again Isaiah says,

¹³ “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.”

¹⁴ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

In View of God’s Mercy:

Instead of passing judgment along to each other (about disputable matters), let us pass on words of encouragement and lives of mutual joy in Jesus and one another. Let us hold firmly to the essentials of our faith and pursue unity with one another. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. The goal is living in harmony for the glory of God.

