

How to Live with Our Differences

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Date: 24 April 2011

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[0:00] Romans 14, accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters.

! One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man whose faith is weak eats only vegetables.! The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not eat, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does.

For God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls, and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One man considers one day more sacred than another. Another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord.

He who eats meat eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God, and he who abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

[1:11] For none of us lives to himself alone, and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord.

So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life, so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

You then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written, As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me, every tongue will confess to God.

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Well, from time to time we sing a hymn that begins, For your gift of God the Spirit, power to make our lives anew, Pledge of life and hope of glory, Savior, we would worship you.

Crowning gift of resurrection sent from your ascended throne. The Holy Spirit is the crowning gift of resurrection. And Jesus sent him, the Holy Spirit, to his disciples in order to create a community, a people that would belong and be his very own, that would belong to him, as we have just read.

[2:47] And as you remember, on that day, Jews from all over, who spoke all sorts of different languages, who, despite their common religion, had very different backgrounds and different lifestyles, they came to Jerusalem and God saved them.

And so on that day, the church began. And right from the very beginning, the church was multicultural. It was from different places, and there were differences. And right from the very beginning, the church had to learn how to live with each other in the middle of those differences.

You remember in Acts chapter 6, the Grecian Jews and the Palestinian Jews, the Hebrew Jews, they had a problem with each other in the way that their widows were being taken care of.

And they had to learn to work that out. But the problem got worse, because the Holy Spirit then was given to the Gentiles, and now Gentiles were converted.

And all of a sudden, you had even more multicultural, more differences. And they were all part of this new community called the church.

[4:05] And you know it's no different today. There were differences then, there's differences now. Here at Grace Fellowship Church, there are differences between what you think and what someone else thinks.

Some of the things that you think are wrong, another brother thinks are right. And others have strong opinions about one thing, and another brother will have the exact opposite opinion and still hold it as strongly.

And yet, here we are in the same body, the same community, and we have to learn how to live with those differences. And so, the real pressing question is, and the reason this is so important is, how

are we going to keep this together?

How are we going to live with differences? And so, we're in a series called How To, and so we're coming to this question of, how do we live with our differences?

And it's, the context of this question is, the body of Christ within the church. How to live with differences just in general would be a huge topic, and we couldn't go there.

[5:13] Thankfully, God doesn't leave us to our own ideas. But, Paul has addressed, at least, he's begun to address this problem in Romans chapter 14.

And, he gives the Roman Christians, and he gives us some advice, some direction, some commands, on how we can live together, despite our differences, and with our differences.

And actually, we're going to find out that those differences turn out to be a strength, and not a weakness, when we handle them correctly. But, before we get into Paul's exact advice, let me give you some definitions of how Paul uses certain words in Romans 14.

Paul talks about two groups of people. He talks about the weak and the strong. And, according, there's weak people, weak in faith people, and there's strong in faith people.

Well, who are the weak? Well, Paul says they have weaker faith. That is, their faith is weaker in the sense that it allows them less liberties. The weak people won't eat meat.

[6:18] They'll only eat vegetables. Somehow or other, the meat is tainted in their minds. And, the weak people want to keep certain days as special, as holy.

And, so they have these more internal convictions about their behavior, and on their behavior. And, really, they are weaker. They don't have a full understanding or appreciation of the freedom that they have in Christ.

On the other hand, the strong, they do have more freedom. They aren't bothered at all by the meat. To them, all foods alike. They're not particularly too concerned about keeping this day or that day, or, these are probably referring to special Jewish holidays.

To them, every day is alike. To them, all food is clean. And, so they have this, a more complete understanding of their gospel freedom. And, so that's why Paul calls them the stronger ones.

So, what's Paul's advice in these disputable matters where believers disagree with each other?

How do we live with differences like that? Well, I want you to look at verse 5, first of all.

[7:31] He says, get a conviction. Verse 5, One man considers one day more sacred than another. Another man considers every day alike.

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. So, did you catch that? Each one is to be fully convinced in his own mind.

Paul doesn't say, and this is what we would expect him to say, Paul doesn't say, well, be flexible with each other. Just chill out. You know?

Just, you two get along. You know, don't worry about this matter, who's right and who's wrong. He says, be fully convinced. Get a conviction.

Find out what you believe is right and really believe it. Don't waver. Don't give in to some sort of wishy-washy shallowness where all differences, they're just not important.

[8:30] You don't have to, it doesn't matter what you believe. Paul says, believe. Believe what you think is right. Believe it fully. Paul uses that same word when he's talking about Abraham, believing that God is going to give him a child according to the promise.

In Romans 4.21, Abraham was fully persuaded. That's our word. He's fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised. And so, you know, Abraham, he's the father of the faithful. His faith is the paradigm. And so, Abraham was convinced, he was fully convinced that God was going to give him a child just like he had promised. And you remember, it says that Abraham didn't waver through unbelief.

He was fully convinced. And so, Paul is using the same word and he's saying, he's telling us to be fully convinced. Let each person be fully convinced about for them, what is the right thing to do and no doubting.

No doubt about it. And you're probably thinking, and hopefully you're thinking, what in the world?

How is that going to make things better?

[9:43] What isn't, shouldn't you be thinking that? How is that going to make things, isn't that going to make things worse? We already have people disagreeing with each other. And Paul is saying, well, what you really need to do is believe more firmly what you think is right.

Believe more firmly. Get a strong conviction. Well, how does that help us? I mean, how is that, how are all these people, if we all have firm, solid, strong convictions, how is that going to help us? Won't that make it, everything worse? Well, Paul's going to tell us and show us, and he does, how this is actually for our good and it doesn't end up making more fights and more conflict.

It actually leads to more worship. And part of the answer it begins with, what are we fully convinced of? That's the question. Convinced of what?

He wants us to be fully convinced and he wants us to be fully convinced that what we are doing is not sin for us. It's not sin.

[10:45] Our choice, that whatever our behavior, whatever we're talking about, that choice for us is not sin. And that's what he says in verse 23. We didn't read it, but you could look over on verse 23, Romans 14, 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. And so Paul wants us to believe that what we're doing is not sin.

Be fully convinced that, you know, what I'm about to do is not sinful for me. Don't waver through any unbelief. If you think it's sin, don't do it. And then he wants us to be convinced that what we're doing, we can do for the Lord's glory.

And that's what he says in verse 6. He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord. He who eats meat eats to the Lord. And for he gives thanks and he who abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

And so do you see that refrain there in verse 6. To the Lord. To the Lord. Paul wants them to be fully convinced that what they are doing they can do to the Lord for the glory of Christ.

[12:00] And so Paul is saying, get a conviction that what you are doing you can really do for the Lord and for His glory. Now what doesn't Paul say?

Paul doesn't say, be convinced that everyone else who disagrees with you is wrong. He doesn't say that. You might not get what that brother is doing.

The weak person might not really understand at all how that person can do that and not be sinning. But Paul is saying you don't have to get it from their perspective.

You need to be convinced in your own thinking. You don't have to understand their thinking. You need to be convinced in yourself. In your own mind. That's where these convictions need to begin and where they for the most part need to stay on disputable matters.

Well, how does that help? So we have these people that are firmly convinced that what they are doing are right. Well, and they're fully convinced that what they are doing is actually for the Lord's glory.

[13:07] Well, how does that help? Well, it gets everyone on the same page on a deeper level than on just behavior. So up here is behavior and we could be all the same on this behavior but that's not what we're finding and we don't think that that's really not going to be possible.

And so Paul is saying the unity needs to be found on a deeper level. Instead, instead of having just all the same behavior, we need to together be pursuing Christ's glory.

That's what verse 6 and 7 are about. So what you're doing, you're fully convinced that what you're doing is for the Lord's glory and so here we are, we have these different opinions but we are all striving for the same thing, that we're all striving to do these things for the Lord so that we can do them unto the Lord and that the Lord is glorified.

So, whether you eat meat or you refrain from eating meat, whether you drink alcohol or you don't drink alcohol, if you are doing it unto the Lord, giving thanks to God, then God is glorified.

Now, so what Paul is doing is he's saying we need to put first things first. Paul, well, he's saying that no matter what you do, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, you do it for the glory of God.

[14:32] That's the first thing. There's no, there's no lesser goal. He's not putting peace over God's glory. He's saying God's glory is more important than a uniformity of behavior.

For God's glory is more important than just having peace on the level of behavior. And so Jesus doesn't want, our risen Savior doesn't want peace at any cost.

He wants us to have peace, but when we're pursuing it for his glory, when we're doing it for him and for his honor. And so as we're striving to praise God, then we can learn we're unified at that.

And so we can live with our differences. And so Paul's getting our heads out of the sand about, you know, all these petty squabbles and he's saying, what is the main thing here?

People, what's the main thing? What do we have to worry about? It's Jesus' glory. That's the goal. That's what we need to pursue all the time. And so let's be striving for that. Let's be unified for that. [15:35] Now, someone is still probably asking, but I don't get it. I don't, I don't really get this. I mean, you're saying that and I sort of understand that, but when you get down to the nitty gritty, I don't get it.

How can people do opposite things to the glory of God? How can people do opposite things to the glory of God?

How can one person drink and another person refrain? How can someone eat me and not eat me? How can people do opposite things to the glory of God? Well, Paul answers that in verse 6 and verse 7.

How can opposite convictions both glorify Christ? In verse 6, he just states it. He gives this assertion. The convinced meat eater does it to the Lord.

And the convinced vegetarian does it to the Lord. It's just the statement. And so, he says, you need to re, if you think you can't be, you need to reprogram your thinking a little bit and you have to realize, you know what?

[16:46] They both can do it to the Lord. Opposite things can both glorify God, can please God. And in verse 7, he pulls out the big theological gun and he proves it.

He says, you think it's hard to imagine how a meat eater and a vegetarian can both glorify God by doing completely opposite things. Well, let this blow your mind.

For, that's a grounding statement, a statement of reason, of showing why what he said before is true. Why is verse 6 true? Because verse 7 is true.

For, none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to God or we live to the Lord. And if we die, we die to the Lord.

So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. And so, Paul's saying, you think meat eating and vegetarianism are opposites. You think drinking and teetotaling or having drums and a guitar and a piano are opposites.

[17:50] Look at this. Living, dying. Now, those are opposites. And we glorify Jesus when we live for him. And so, when we eat and drink and we enjoy pleasures and we sing and we glorify Jesus as we live and experience life.

And you know what else we do? We glorify Jesus when we don't do those things. When we stop breathing, stop eating, stop drinking, stop singing.

And so, it's the ultimate enjoyment, the ultimate refraining and we can do them both for the glory of God. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

And so, when we live for Christ, Jesus is glorified and when we call death gain because we get Jesus, Jesus is glorified. And so, if we can do these totally opposite things, if we can do living and dying for Jesus and for His glory, then surely we can do these lesser opposite things for Christ.

So, be convinced of what you believe but realize that just because someone is doing the exact opposite of what you think needs to be done or doing the exact opposite of what you think is right, it doesn't mean that they are sinning or that they are any less glorifying than Jesus.

[19:14] are glorifying to Jesus. So, be fully convinced. Put Christ's glory first and accept people and accept that people are going to have opposite opinions and opposite practices can really both honor Christ.

Now, verse 9, he's going to build on his argument. In the first place, he said, get a conviction and now in verses 9-12, Paul says, if we're going to live together with these differences, we need to recognize Jesus' lordship.

Recognize Jesus' lordship. For this reason, for this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. So, who's the Lord of both the dead and the living?

Well, Jesus, the one who died and returned to life. he died and returned to life so that he could be Lord of the living and the dead. Jesus died and returned to life so that he could be the Lord of the eaters and the non-eaters, the meat eaters, the vegetarians, to be the Lord of the people who raise their hand in worship and the people who don't, the drinkers, the non-drinkers.

He died and rose again to be Lord. Lord. And that's something that we have to recognize as we go into these situations. I'm not the Lord.

[20:41] These are not my people. We didn't celebrate my death on Friday. We celebrated his death. And today we didn't sing up from the grave I arose.

We didn't. We sang up from the grave he arose. And Jesus is Lord. And he's Lord of all the brothers. And all the sisters. Whether you agree with him or not, he's the Lord.

And so whether we think they're right in certain areas or not, that doesn't change the fact that Jesus is their Lord and I'm not. Well, how will we show that we recognize Jesus' Lordship?

And that's what Paul talks about. How do we actually show that, you know what, in this situation I appreciate the fact that Jesus is the Lord. Well, you see it in verse 10. You then, why do you judge your brother?

He's talking to the weak here, the weak in faith. He's talking to the weak people who, in these disputable matters, they have a tendency to think of everything as in black and white.

[21:47] They see the matter of the disagreement as sin or not sin. and because they have that tendency, they have a tendency also to judge, to condemn their strong brother for what they're doing.

And so Paul says, who do you, why do you judge your brother? I'm not the judge. You're not the judge. Jesus was raised to new life.

We saw this this morning. He was raised to new life to be the judge and not me. And so that's why in verse 4, Paul says, who are you to judge someone else's servant?

To his own master he stands or fall and he will stand for the Lord is able to make him stand. He's the Lord's servant. He's not your servant. And before that, in verse 3, and the man who does not eat everything must not, that's the weak man, he does not eat everything, must not condemn the man who does for God has accepted him.

And so right here, in the middle of this whole dispute, Paul brings in the gospel. This is justification by faith. Weak in faith saint, don't judge the strong person.

[23:01] God has accepted him. In God's free, sovereign, grace, and mercy, he has pronounced that person not guilty. Not guilty.

God has accepted him and not because all of his opinions are right. And not because he does everything right and he thinks, he doesn't accept him because he thinks exactly the same way as you do. He's accepted him because of Jesus Christ and so watch out.

That's the Lord's servant you're talking about. And the Lord can make him stand and he's going to make him stand. And so him agreeing with you or not is not the mark of his acceptance with God. But then the strong in faith, they don't go scot-free. How are the strong in faith going to show that they too recognize Jesus' lordship? Well, verse 10, it goes on.

Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. So who are you, oh strong man, to look your nose down at your weaker brother, at his scruples, and say, oh he's weak.

[24:14] He needs to grow up. Doesn't he know these things? These things aren't wrong or right. They're just, we can do them. There's freedom here. He's so uptight about such small things.

And Paul says, you can't do that. Jesus died for that weaker brother. Jesus hung on the cross for that weaker brother.

brother. And Jesus is the lord of that weaker brother. And that weaker brother won't be saved because all of his opinions are right. Any more than you will. But because of what Jesus has done for him, just like you.

So there's not weak or strong when you're standing and begging for mercy at the cross. So how can you look down your nose at him? You're a sinner just as much as he is.

And you are going to judgment just like he is too. And so where is all this going? We're rushing to judgment. Every knee will bow.

[25:14] Every tongue will confess Jesus is lord to the glory of God. And each one of us will give an account. So don't look down your nose at your brother. Your judgment is coming after all. And if you make it through, it won't be because you had all the right opinions.

It will be because Jesus had mercy on you. Because God has accepted you. because of him. So recognize Jesus is lord. And with him you stand.

And without him you fall. So be very careful. So in the first place, Paul says, let's get the goal straight. What are we really after here? We're not, we want to be united in glorifying.

We want to have in glorifying Christ. We want to be striving with full conviction for Christ's glory. And now in the second part, Paul says, look up.

Jesus is lord. And that needs to cast a shadow over all of our disagreements. And then thirdly, he says, basically, work for unity, not uniformity.

[26 : 26] Work for unity, not uniformity. from verses, from 14, 13 to chapter 15, verse 6, Paul is giving practical suggestions for each group.

And he tells the weak what to do and he tells the strong what to do. And we could summarize Paul's advice by saying what we really need to be doing is working for unity, not uniformity.

So what's, well, look over at 15, 5. This is kind of near the apex of this whole passage where this is going.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So what is Paul after? What's all this leading up to? He wants unity. Unified worship. He's not after uniformity.

[27 : 29] Uniformity is where we all act the same, we all think the same, we all have the same opinions, we all dress the same. It's just uniform. And we all get along because we all agree with each other. And everyone has the same opinion.

But that isn't what Paul is striving for. And he says he never even brings that as a possibility. From verse 13 all the way to the end of the section, Paul keeps talking about the strong and the weak. They're going to be there. They're always going to be there. You can't make everyone agree and that's impossible in this life. As much teaching as anyone does, there's still going to be people who are weak.

And no matter how much arguing and debating there is, there's still going to be differences. We have different backgrounds. There's so many different things that come together to form our opinions. And so, there's going to be all these differences.

And so, we can't make uniformity the goal where we all think alike and so we get along. Instead, Paul wants unity. Unity of spirit. And so, things are, they look different on the outside.

[28 : 36] What goes on in your house and what goes on in my house are going to look different. But at the same time, at an underlying level, there's unity. unity. And so, we're striving together for the same thing in different ways.

So, in a symphony, you have the orchestra. The different people play different music. The violins are playing a kind of music and they sound different.

And then the drums are playing a different music and they sound different. But when they are all put together, they make a beautiful sound. And that's what the church is. It's different people playing different instruments, different music, and it's all coming together to the glory of Christ.

That's what Paul is after. And so, Paul says, work for that. Work for the unity of spirit unto praise. Well, how do we do that? Practically, how do we do that? I can't go through this whole session.

I just want to point out a few things. We love each other. We love each other. And how do we do that? If you're strong, you show your strength, you show your love by refraining for your brother's sake.

[29 : 51] You see that in verse 15. Notice there. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you're no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

Now, I don't think Paul is saying that everyone, if someone in the church has a problem with meat eating, then everyone in the whole church has to stop eating meat.

He's not saying that the whole church has to bow to the opinion of the weakest brother. But Paul is saying don't be careless about using your liberty when you know that your brother might be drawn into sin, when he might be hurt and ruined, and his experience of the body of Christ might be hurt and ruined, and so don't callously enjoy your liberty when your brother is right there.

Okay? Think about the other person. Strong people are not strong just because they can do all sorts of things. And I think that's what a lot of strong people think.

Well, I can do whatever I want, and they think they're so strong because they have all this liberty. They're strong if they can refrain out of love and wisdom for their brother's sake.

[31:08] Love is more important than freedom. And if you can't out of love stop doing what you're doing when it's hurting your brother, then you're really not so strong after all. So use wisdom.

Perhaps in certain settings you can enjoy some of your liberties, that in other settings you can't enjoy those things. But think about it. And did you see Paul's motivation?

What he's saying? why you should be acting this way. At the end of verse 15, do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

Jesus died for that weaker brother. Shouldn't you care about him? Shouldn't you love him too? If Jesus went to such painful lengths that we saw on Friday, of nails and thorns and the wrath of God and loneliness and shame to love that weaker brother, then you should love him too.

And you should be able to help him and not hurt him. But in this passage, Paul does put the onus, the responsibility on the strong.

[32:22] The stronger to show their strength by accepting the weak, by welcoming the weak.

That's what you see in chapter 14 verse 1. Accept him whose faith is weak. That means welcome them, bring them men, befriend them.

And 15.1, the stronger to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please themselves. So, when there are disagreements, it's for the strong to give up their rights to serve the weak.

Let me repeat that. When there are disagreements, it's for the strong to give up their rights to serve the weak. And if anyone says, well, that's not fair.

That's not fair. I have the right to do this. Why do I have to submit to them? I'm not their child. I'm not a child where I have to do whatever anyone else wants.

They aren't my master. So why should I submit to them? Why do I have to be the one to give in when they're the weaker ones? Well, on a fleshly human level, I totally sympathize with that.

[33:35] But when we are there, we need to remember the gospel. And that's where Paul ends up. Romans 15 3. For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

Christ wasn't claiming his rights when he was hanging on Golgotha's tree. He wasn't thinking about well, what's good for me when he was dying under the Lord's wrath.

He was submitting himself for our good. He was giving up his rights for our good. And it was love that drove him there, and it is love that's going to keep grace fellowship together.

And so heaven help us if grace fellowship gets too far from the cross. If we wander from the gospel and we just lose our faith and we lose our wonder, we're going to tear each other up like a pack of dogs.

Because the only way this community that the Holy Spirit has brought together is going to survive as if the gospel is front and center, if we're living there. And if we keep coming back to that bloody tree that we saw on Friday and keep coming back to those wounds and keep coming back to Jesus and his words, then we're going to find grace there for accepting our weaker brother, for not condemning our stronger brother, and to keep loving each other, even when it means saying no to myself.

[35:18] well, that's how you work on unity without uniformity. So, if we're all there, if we're all at the foot of the cross, drinking up encouragement, finding endurance, then we're going to continue to have a spirit of unity.

I think to a great degree we've enjoyed that. But I want to bring us back to where we found that and where we'll continue to find it. And so, we want to be joined around the cross with the spirit of unity where our heart, where with one heart and one mouth, we're glorifying God.

And so, brothers and sisters, do you see what Jesus wants? What he wants for us. What he wants for us. What he died to gain. Not uniformity, but unity.

And not wavering about all sorts of things, but he wants conviction. If he's Lord, then we need to treat him like Lord, and if something's sin to us, we don't play around with it.

He wants conviction. And not judging each other, not looking down our noses at each other, but loving. And so, do you see then how when we have differences, they can actually be our strengths?

[36:37] So, now instead of having just four violins playing the same notes, what Jesus has done is he's made a whole orchestra. And we're playing a symphony to God's praise.

And so your brother, he'll play a different instrument than you will. And if he does, then rejoice. And if your sister, she plays different notes than you do, then rejoice.

And so, when we're all around the cross, and we're all holding hands around that, and we're all looking there, together, then I can sing my song on my instrument to my Lord, and God is glorified. And you can sing your song, you can play your song on your instrument, and God is glorified. Your song might be different than mine, but when we're together around the cross, looking to Jesus, living for Jesus, then we can rejoice.

We can rejoice. I'm not in this by myself, and here's my brother or sister, and they're doing something totally different, but the Lord is glorified. And Jesus is worthy.

[37 : 46] He is worthy of having more than just my one note, my one instrument. He deserves the praise of all of his people singing all of their songs in all of their different ways.

And when we do that, he is glorified. So that's what we do. That's how we live with differences. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we do ask that you would please make the gospel sweet to us this week.

Please don't let us get so involved with all the work that we have to do next week, and our families, and the rushing around, and school, that we forget to have quiet time, we forget to have devotions, but that we would make those a priority this week because we know how dangerous we are when we don't have the gospel, and we know how hard it is to fight sin when the gospel seems fuzzy and distant.

So Holy Spirit, please keep us near the cross this week. That's all we ask. That Jesus would shine, that we would have eyes to see him, and that we would learn to love each other deeply because the Lord has deeply loved us.

So do good to this church. You know our weaknesses. You know our differences. You know the particular things that trouble us.

[39 : 11] So be our Lord, protect us from ourselves, and sanctify us so that we would be like you, Lord Jesus. And it's in your name I pray, Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.