

"Accept One Another"
(Romans 14:1-15:7)
Pastor Woohyun Jung
May 27, 2018

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¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written:

"As surely as I live," says the Lord,
'every knee will bow before me;
every tongue will acknowledge God.'"

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

¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. ¹⁴ I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. ¹⁵ If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

²² So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

¹⁵ We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. ³ For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." ⁴ For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Core Issue: The gospel beckons us to accept and love one another in all circumstances. Knowing that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, we are now called to have peace with one another. We must also have wisdom to discern if an issue is a disputable matter or not.

Opposing Value: We don't want to give up on our freedom.

INTRODUCTION

As we end off our family month, I pray that you were inspired by the teachings on biblical manhood and womanhood. If you missed them, I encourage you to listen to them online. And just as we learned, let us continue to equip ourselves with the truth and allow God's Word to *define* who we are and *dictate* what we do. Today, I think it's appropriate that we'll be talking about **how we should treat one another as brothers and sisters in Christ**. To do this, we'll turn to the book of Romans. So, if you have your Bibles, please turn to Romans 14:1 and we'll read it up to 15:7.

I love Romans because it's so clear and precise in teaching what the gospel is. If you haven't read it, I strongly encourage you to do so. The book is really divided into two parts. Chapters 1-11 describes **the nature of the gospel**, which essentially is the good news telling us that we are justified in God's sight by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone. Then in chapters 12-16, Paul describes **the implications of the gospel** – what happens to our lives when we fully *understand* and *experience* the gospel with our minds and hearts. Simply put, there will be a radical transformation. As one pastor said, "When you taste grace, you cannot remain status quo." Today, we'll discuss how the gospel transforms our relationships especially on how we should deal with the differences of opinion on various matters.

Now, this is a long passage. But I believe that it's absolutely necessary for us to read the whole thing in order for us to make sense of the situation that the Roman Christians were in. That being said, as I read it, I need you to listen carefully. Follow the logic of Paul's arguments. And don't let anything distract you. Open your hearts and minds to hear what God has to say because this is the Word prepared for you.

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. ⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is

written: “As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.’”¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.¹⁴ I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.¹⁵ If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.¹⁶ Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.²² So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves.²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.¹ We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.² Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.³ For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”⁴ For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had,⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

The passage was so clear and challenging in itself that I could finish my sermon right here and you’ll still have so much to take home. But let me *humbly* and *carefully* point out a few things that will help our community to become more like Jesus Christ in the way we treat one another.

1) THE PROBLEM – WHAT WAS GOING ON?

Let’s read verse 1 again. “Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.” Paul tells us that there’s a dispute or a disagreement and it’s causing quarreling in the church. What’s the dispute about? Verse 2 gives us the answer: “One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.” Essentially it was about food. There were those who were eating meat and those who refused to do so. And you’re thinking, “Seriously? They’re fighting about food?” It doesn’t seem like a big deal – who cares if one eats meat or not? But as we all know, **it’s the small issue like this that have led to bitter feelings, breakdown of the relationships, splitting of the churches, and even dishonoring of Christ Himself.** Though the issue may seem trivial, the implication can be greatly detrimental to the community.

Now many of you may be asking, “Why are the vegetarians called the weak?” Is there something wrong with being a vegetarian? Of course not. Then why is Paul calling them “weak”? To answer this question, we need to go back to the Old Testament. From reading Leviticus, we know that the Israelites were given a lot of restrictions on food. They weren’t allowed to eat certain animals like pigs, camels, rabbits, and many more. If you eat them, you would be considered unclean. Although it may sound odd to us as to why God gave this commandment, there were three purposes for it. **First, it reminded the Israelites that God is holy.** God is set apart; He is absolutely and perfectly sinless and good. You could not enter His presence if you were found to be unclean. **Second, God decides what is clean or unclean, not us.** Some of you may be wondering how, by eating these animals, make you unclean. But that’s exactly the point. We don’t get to decide what makes us holy, righteous, and good. He does. **Lastly, it reminded the Israelites that they are also called to be holy.** God wanted them to be set apart from other nations – by not eating these animals when all the other nations do, it was a visible representation to show that the people of God were called to be different in their identity and culture.

This, however, has radically changed when Jesus came and declared in Matthew 5:17, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*” What Jesus is saying is this: “It’s true that you had to keep yourself clean by obeying these laws. Now, I didn’t come to declare that you’re no longer bound by that law because somehow that law is no longer in effect or it’s unimportant. No, I came to obey that law perfectly *on behalf of you.* Therefore, if you remain in Me, you are declared clean.” In other words, **Jesus makes you clean so that you are made acceptable and righteous before God.** Then the implication is that since everything that was once unclean is now clean through Christ, to maintain that something is still unclean is a failure to realize the full implications of the gospel.

But that’s exactly what was happening. The church in Rome was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Unfortunately, these Jewish Christians were having a hard time making that transition. They were having a hard time taking it in that they no longer have to do certain things that they were accustomed to doing, now that they were believers in Jesus Christ. Hence, they continued to abstain from eating meat. Read the end of 14:6, “*Whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.*” This verse is so important because it tells us that the weak were choosing to abstain based on what they believe will most honor God and express their gratitude. Of course, Paul knew that they were wrong in this conviction. They lacked the knowledge that would liberate their faith and lives. And this is why Paul refers to them as the weak. In contrast, the strong, most likely the Gentile Christians, had a fuller understanding of God and the implications of the gospel. They knew that things like food could not make them unclean for they are made clean in Jesus Christ.

Now, as we consider this, we must keep three things in mind. **Number one, both the strong and the weak are Christians.** Paul is not saying that the weak Christians aren’t saved or that they don’t trust Jesus. Paul knows that the reason why these Jewish believers are not eating meat is not a way to be justified or secure their acceptance with God. The weak just believed that eating meat will not honor God.

Number two, disputable matters are NOT the biblical truths but the gray areas of life. For example, the gospel truths are not the disputable matters. What is defined to be sin in the Bible is not a disputable matter. Let me make it clear: there is to be no flexibility regarding the gospel, the fundamental teachings of the faith, or how God defines sin. Christians are to zealously and faithfully hold to them. But we do recognize that there are gray areas in life which are the practices that God hasn't specifically spoken in His Word. Instead, the Bible gives Christians the liberty to make God-glorifying decisions on these things based on their knowledge and convictions. For the Romans, the disputable matters were regarding eating, drinking, and Sabbath. What are some of the gray areas of our lives? It could also be drinking, eating, and Sabbath; but there are other issues like dating, clothes, social media, technology, music, movies, shows, and more.

Number three, anyone can be strong or weak depending on the circumstances. In 1 Corinthians 8, we see another dispute. Some people there were saying, "You can't eat meat sacrificed to the idols" while others claimed that you can. Now, Paul calls the people who claimed that you *couldn't* eat that meat, weak. These people basically thought that some kind of power of these gods may still reside in the meat. They believed that if you eat meat sacrificed to the idols, you might somehow dishonor God and be cursed by Him. But Paul says that the meat is fine to eat. These people just couldn't see the completeness of their identity and salvation in Jesus Christ. Hence, those who said you *could* eat the meat, Paul called them strong.

This is very important to note because in Rome, those who wanted to obey the dietary laws of the OT and *not eat meat* would most likely have been the Jewish Christians. But in Corinth, those who did *not eat meat* sacrificed to the idols would most likely have been the Gentiles Christians. The act is the same (not eating meat) but in one case the Jews were the weak while in another case the Gentiles were the weak. In other words, **it means that depending on your background and life experiences, you could either be weak or strong in different situations.** What does this mean? It means that we must remain humble.

Keeping those three things in mind, let's go back to our passage. We get that there were those who ate meat, enjoying their freedom in Christ, and those who abstained to honor God. Then what was the problem? Paul tell us that the weak were judging, condemning, and treating the strong with contempt *while* the strong were also judging and looking down on the weak – being filled with pride and arrogance (14:4, 10, 13). **And Paul tells them to stop judging each other.** Now, this doesn't imply that we shouldn't judge at all. We won't have time to flesh this out today. But let me make it clear that as Christians we must make judgments about what is good and bad, right and wrong, and wise and foolish. That's what Jesus did and that's exactly what Paul is doing here – he's judging the Roman Christians. **In contrast, the Roman Christians were being judgmental – its only intention was to criticize, expose, shame, and destroy one another.** That's why Paul wanted them to stop.

If you were in this situation, how would you respond? You might say, "Don't worry; I won't judge because I really don't care about food." Well, let's try to bring this closer to home. If you were addicted to alcohol before you met Christ, you may believe that drinking as a whole is not pleasing to the Lord. If you were recklessly spending money before you met Christ, you may become very frugal in order to please God. If you enjoyed watching R-rated movies and shows before you met Christ, you may be very careful in your choice of entertainment in desire to honor God. But what if you saw someone else drinking, spending more money than they should, or watching a movie or show that you would never watch? How would you respond? If you were the weak, would you find yourself judging others? If you were the strong, would you find yourself looking down on others so quickly? In principle, we may be struggling with the same issue as the Christians in Rome.

2) THE SOLUTION – HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

Before we talk about this, I want to address one thing. In this passage, Paul talks to both the weak and the strong to correct and teach them. But for the time sake, I had to choose only one group to talk about and I decided to talk more about the strong simply because Paul also addresses this truth *mainly* to the strong. **Paul does this because the implication of their action is absolutely devastating and greatly destructive to the weak.** 14:13 tells us that their actions were like putting stumbling blocks in the way of the weak. 14:15 tells us that they're not acting in love. 14:15 tells us that they're destroying the weak. And 14:20 tells us that they're destroying the work of God – all because they think that they're superior to the weak. So, in this section, I'll focus mainly on the response the strong should have. Of course, I do encourage you to think about the applications for the weak and what it means for them to accept the strong – it has something to do with knowing that God is our ultimate Judge. I'll just leave it at that.

Now, as a solution, here's what Paul *doesn't* say, "Okay everyone, stop complaining and just eat meat because it's fine to do that" or "All of you, just stop eating meat altogether." But here's what he offers as a solution: **Accept one another.** He says this in 14:1 and 15:7. Now, what does it mean to accept? First, this is not the kind of acceptance or tolerance this society embraces where one says, "You don't bother me, and I won't bother you." **The word "accept" in Greek means welcome, receive, or bring it to yourself.** In other words, Paul means that when you accept, you do recognize that one is weaker in their conscience. But you don't look down on them or ignore them; rather you welcome them, receive them, and bring them to yourself even if it causes you to change and accommodate your life. We see this in 14:20. "*Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.*" Did you see that? **Accepting another means accommodating to their needs by giving up your rights.** The strong is not to stress the weak by just dismissing them because you think that they don't know what they're talking about. The strong must slow down, listen, be patient, empathetic, and understanding of the weak. They must *value* the weak.

The reason why we should do this is because **all of us are members of one body** as Paul addresses in 12:3-5. If you say that this person's sensitivity is not your problem, you're denying yourself because we're one body. Then if it's a problem for one, it must be a problem for us all. We don't operate as individuals in the church anymore. We are a community. **We ought to learn to be mindful of each other.** We rejoice together. We grieve together. We protect each other. We edify each other. We keep each other accountable. And we grow together. Read with me 14:19. "*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*" Brothers and sisters, my honest question to you is this: in order to do this, are you ready to give up many things for the sake of your community? Perhaps your pride, way of life, or freedom? Let me get even more practical: the way you dress, the car you drive, the neighborhood you live in, the house you buy, how you spend your vacation, what movies and shows you watch, the kinds of jokes you enjoy, the way you use your social media, and the list can be endless. Are you ready to change your life in these areas and more for the edification and building up of others if you know that your decisions are stumbling others?

Now, this is not easy to live it out. Even if you agree with this in your head, your heart may not be moved. Your instinct to protect yourself may kick in: “Why should I change my life for their sake? It’s unfair. I’m just going to tell them that they’re wrong and tell them to change their life.” You know what? You’re right. It isn’t fair. But let me share what Pastor Peter once said: “Blessing others is always an inconvenience.” If this is true, then, are you ready to *inconvenience* yourselves today for the sake of others? In 15:1, Paul says, “*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*” This literally says: “We who are strong are *obligated to bear* the failings of the weak.” In other words, the strong have an obligation to carry the weak. This is absolutely counter-cultural. But that’s exactly what we Christians are called to be. We ought to be different from this world. We ought to be set apart from this culture. We ought to live in such a way that will cause the world to call us “fools.” **Brothers and sisters, don’t you want to be part of this kind of community? Don’t you want to experience the power of God working in our community? It must start with you.** Of course, I know that this is not easy. We cannot just force ourselves to do this. It doesn’t work like that. We need something greater. We need our hearts changed.

3) THE POWER – HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE THIS?

Look at 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.’*” Here, Paul quotes from Psalm 69 where in its context, a good and righteous man endures undeserved suffering and persecution. In applying this to Jesus, Paul is saying that Jesus was willing to be mocked, tortured, and killed by those who were God’s enemies. **Jesus didn’t choose a convenient life, but He willingly and joyfully went to the cross, sacrificing Himself for the sake of others.** He *inconvenienced* Himself when He gave up His glory and when He bore our failings by paying the debt of our sins. Are you hesitant to give up something for your brothers and sisters? Remember that Jesus gave up His life for you. He went to the cross to accept you. If Jesus did that for you, how dare we say to someone else, “I’m not going to change; if you’re so bothered by it, grow up.”

This reminds me of the ungrateful servant found in Matthew 18:21-35. Here, we see a servant who has been forgiven of the insurmountable debt that he had against his king. Knowing that the servant was not able to pay and seeing him begging on his knees, the king took a pity on him and cancelled his debt. Now, when the servant went out, he saw another man who owed him a very small debt. Jesus tells us that this servant grabbed him, choked him, and demanded the money back. When the man was unable to pay back, the servant put the man into prison. Now, of course, justice is always served. The king hears of this shocking incident. The king calls the servant “wicked” and says in verse 32, “*I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?*” **Brothers and sisters, when we don’t accept others when we have been accepted by Christ, we not only expose our ungrateful hearts, but we are also offending Jesus Himself who was so merciful and gracious to us.**

This is what Paul says in 15:7, “*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*” **Jesus Christ is both our example and our motivation.** He came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). Brothers and sisters, this is where we get the power to accept one another because this is how our hearts were transformed. We’re a new creation in Christ. We now have the heart of Christ in us. The way you can tell how much you understand the gospel is to look at how much you love people despite their flaws. Therefore, accept, love, and receive one another because this is exactly what Jesus did for you. Let your hearts be warmed up by this amazing truth.

APPLICATION

We've talked a lot about this passage. But let me give you four things that will hopefully help us to put this into practice to build up our community.

Number one, we must stop being judgmental, right now. This is sin. This doesn't please God whatsoever. We have no right to be judgmental of others because God accepted them as it says in 14:3. Paul says that God alone is our Judge (14:10, 12). Then let God do the judging as to whether the person is serving Him properly or not. We don't get to decide that. Paul communicates this clearly in 14:4, "*Who are you to judge someone else's servant?*"

Number two, we must clearly discern what *is* and what is *not* a disputable matter. We cannot just assume that *everything* is a disputable matter because it's not. But at the same time, we cannot just assume that *nothing* is a disputable matter. We need to wisely and prayerfully discern this – and for us to do that properly we need to read, study, and know the Bible. But even more important thing is that we must be ready to humbly submit to its teaching, even if you disagree.

Number three, we must make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification (14:19). We must be *active* and *intentional* in fighting against anything or anyone that causes division in our community. We must have nothing to do with them. Don't join in gossip. Before you judge someone, pray for them, give them the benefit of the doubt, talk to them, and listen to them – maybe there was just a huge misunderstanding. Protect the unity and peace of our church. And grieve when it is broken because you love this community so much.

Lastly, we must live for the glory of God. That's the message of 14:7, "*For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*" What's our greatest heart's motivation for doing anything? We do everything for the Lord because we live for Him and we belong to Him. Paul even goes onto say in 14:9 that "*For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.*" We now live for the glory of God in everything because Jesus, by giving up Himself, became not only our Savior but our Lord as well. We are His servants; our lives now belong to Him. Therefore, as 15:7 says, "*Accept one another... just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*"

CONCLUSION

Brothers and sisters, the gospel beckons us to accept and love one another in all circumstances. Knowing that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, we are now called to have peace with one another. I want to end our time by pointing you to Paul's prayer found in 15:5-6. This teaches us that unity is given, established, and preserved by God Himself who chooses to accomplish this through the people of God. I pray that this will be our prayer today. Let's pray.

Let's pray.