



“God > Our Differences”

Romans 14-15

Small Group Plan

Dr. Paul Brand tells of attending a lecture given by legendary anthropologist Margaret Mead. She posed the question to the audience, “*What is the earliest sign of civilization in an ancient society?*” A clay pot? Iron? Tools? Agriculture? No, she explained. To her, evidence of the earliest true civilization is a healed femur, the largest bone in the human body, which she held up before the assembled group.

She explained that a healed femur means that while a person was injured, someone else cared for them – gathered their food, tended to their injury and protected them.

Her point? You can’t have civilization without compassion.

Romans 14-15 are about compassion for each other while we are going through the faith process. Some are wounded, confused and uncertain, while others are hopeful, joyful and at peace. How do we treat each other? Notice Paul’s recurring theme:

Accept him whose faith is weak. (14:1)

Who are you to judge? (14:4)

Why do you judge your brother? (14:10)

Let us stop passing judgment on one another. (14:13)

Do not destroy you brother. (14:15)

Make every effort to do what leads to peace. (14:19)

We ought to bear with the failings of the weak. (15:1)

May God give you a spirit of unity. (15:5)

Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you. (15:7)

We are a fellowship of men and women “*in process.*” We all are moving along, but each is at a different stage in the spiritual journey. And our spiritual progress is enabled by acceptance and unity, not judgmentalism and disharmony.

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- Why do some quickly see differences while others notice similarities?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

— ACCEPTANCE —

Romans 14:1-9

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 live 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.

- “Accept ... for God has accepted” (vs. 1-3).
- What were their “disputable matters” (v. 1)?
- Why does Paul call one group “weak” (vs. 1, 2)?
- Why and how has God “accepted them” (v. 3)?
- How can we apply God's style to our disputable matters?

— ACCOUNTABILITY —

Romans 14:10-12

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.

- How would you answer Paul's first question in verse 10?
- How does knowing that we will give an account to God (v. 12) affect how we treat our brother or sister (v. 10)?

— APPRECIATION —

Romans 14:13-23

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.

- What should be our main relationship guideline in what we say or do?
- As time has passed and you have matured, how has your sensitivity to the consciences of other Christians changed?
- Read verse 19 aloud.
Why does Paul put it at the top of the to do list – “make every effort”?
What efforts can we begin to make?

— AFFIRMATION —

Romans 15:1-7

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.

- “Accept ... as Christ accepted you” (v. 7). List the Christian qualities that we will have to bring together and use in order to accomplish this kind of acceptance.
- How/why does this acceptance of each other bring “praise to God” (v. 7)?
- How does God affirm us today?
- How would you describe the “attitude of mind ... that Christ Jesus had” (v. 5)? What is that attitude?
- Why do we need his attitude and how would it change our style of conflict?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

“Weak ... Strong” I think we all know that everyone is “weak” compared to God. I once heard Jim Woodroof say; “If you compare yourself to other people you will feel either inferior or superior. Neither is true. But if you compare yourself to God you will simply feel humble.”

- How does humility prepare us to handle our disputable matters?
- Since someone somewhere will probably be offended by almost anything we do or say, how can we practically apply the principles in these chapters?
- Regarding the disputable matters (the grey areas), what from these chapters do you most need to hear:
 - (1) Paul’s challenge to not look down on those who have strict convictions, or
 - (2) Paul’s challenge to not condemn those with more lenient convictions?

Explain your answer.
- Close by asking God to help us truly have the mind of Jesus (15:5) as we practice patient love towards each other.