

# Gospel Applied: A Gospel shaped Church – Unity

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 08 June 2014

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[ 0 : 00 ] So, we're reading from Romans chapter 14, verses 1 to 12, and that's on page 1140 in the Red Bible. So, except 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, 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. For none of us lives to himself alone, and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

[ 1 : 18 ] 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. Thank you, Kate.

So keep your Bibles open there at Romans 14. We've been looking over the last few weeks at what it means to apply the gospel to our lives.

As we often say, the gospel, the good news about Jesus, is not just for people who are unbelievers, but it is also for those who are believers. And when the gospel changes us and transforms us, it turns us into people, as we've been seeing, into people of love.

[ 2 : 29 ] But this week we will see that it also causes unity. Well, let's pray together and ask for God's help to us all.

Father, we thank you so much for the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you for the wonderful truths that Jesus died for our sins.

That he rose again from the grave, defeating death, giving forgiveness and a rich welcome into his family to all who will trust him.

Father, we ask that you would continue to shape us and transform us by the gospel.

We pray that it will be understood with our minds, but that it will begin to work out in our life, causing us to love one another deeply, and that it will create and build an inseparable bond between one another.

[ 4 : 06 ] We ask this for your sake, for we long that Jesus be made known. We pray this in his name. Amen.

Well, on the 6th of June, 1944, almost 70 years ago to this day, British and American troops joined together in a united effort and landed on the beaches of Normandy.

Together as one joint force on what became known as D-Day, they made their attack, which led to the winning of the Second World War.

On their own, it just simply wouldn't have been possible. It took two sides united in one mission.

Now, the church is also on a mission.

That is pretty much what Romans is all about. The mission is this, to announce the gospel, the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ to all peoples in all places.

[ 5 : 23 ] And if that mission is to be accomplished, the church must be united. The people must join together as one force and go into the world together.

But the problem is, the unity of the church is always under threat. In fact, the church was in danger of dividing.

They were having their own particular D-Day. First, look at verse 1. He says, Except him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

So instead of joining together, they were actually dividing over what we might call secondary matters, or non-gospel issues.

You see, the church was made up of two main groups. On the one side, there were Jewish people from a religious background. And on the other side, there were people from a Gentile, a non-religious background.

[ 6 : 41 ] And both sets of people, both groups of people, had all come to faith in Jesus Christ. They were all part of the church. But, both these groups had a different opinion about non-gospel issues.

There was an argument over disputable matters. So what were these disputes all about? Well, we're going to look at them briefly.

Firstly, first, they were dividing over what you could eat and could not eat. So look at verse 2. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

Now we'll come back to that in a minute. Second, they were dividing about certain days in the diary. So verse 5. One man considers one day more sacred than another.

Another man considers every day alike. Now we might think that absolutely crazy. Who's going to divide about whether you have vegetables or whether you have pork?

[ 7 : 57 ] What's the big issue? Well, we've got to remember here the context and the culture of the church. You see, those from a Jewish and a religious background had been taught all through their childhood and all through their lives, according to the Old Testament law, that food and festivals were really important.

It was part of your cultural identity and it was also part of your belief system. So if you ate certain kinds of food like pork sausages, well then you would be considered unclean before God.

And if you didn't observe special days like the Sabbath, then you would be considered unacceptable to God. So while they had all come to faith in Christ, they understood that God accepts people not on the basis of what we do, but simply on the basis of what Christ has done. They knew that, but yet with all their background and all the teaching and their culture all around them, it was just really hard to shake off what you believed and practiced all your life.

Yes, they knew the gospel was true, but it was taking time for the gospel to get right deep down into their lives and begin to change what had been the pattern of their life for so long.

[ 9 : 29 ] Some of you here might come from a particular religious background and your religious tradition taught you that you couldn't drink alcohol or that you couldn't play games on a Sunday.

But now that you've come to faith in Jesus Christ, you know that those things don't save you, but still it's hard to shake off what has been the pattern and practice for so long.

So we had those of a religious background on one side and then we had the Jews or the Gentiles who had no religious tradition. And when they came to faith and when they became part of the church, they really couldn't get these Jewish people at all.

What were they going on about food and festivals and why you can't eat this and how you must only eat that and this day was more important than this day? What was the big deal?

Now some of you might come from a background that is a little bit more liberal than traditional. So having your tea and coffee during the worship service is no big deal.

[ 10 : 37 ] Why do people get upset about that? What's all the fuss about? It's not about tea and coffee, it's about faith in Jesus. So in this context, as in every church, there are always arguments over secondary matters.

And the result was obvious. Verse 10 You then, why do you judge your brother or sister?

Or why do you look down on your brother or sister? You see, the two groups were beginning to divide. One side was judging the other for not following certain practices and the other side was beginning to look down on the others because they did follow them.

And instead of loving each other, which was chapter 12 and 13, that was what that was all about, they were beginning to be critical and condemning one another. Instead of joining in the force

together and being part of the one mission together and going and telling the good news to all people in all places, it was all about internal struggles and they were beginning to fall out over differences of opinion.

Now as I look out on this church, and I see myself very much as part of this church, there's people from all kinds of backgrounds. There's different nationalities represented here.

[12:18] We come from different cultures. We have different religious and family traditions. But yet, because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we have been united together as one people, one family.

But it doesn't take me to tell you this, that we don't actually always agree, do we? Yes, we agree on primary matters, like salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

That's a big theme in Romans. That was central. That was not to be changed. Yes, we agree on the authority of Scripture, but we disagree on all sorts of secondary issues, or as it says in verse 1, disputable matters.

So let me throw out a few, stir a little bit of argument amongst us. Should we have our own building, or should we continue to rent?

Can we celebrate the Lord's Supper in our home groups, or should it only be on a Sunday morning? Is it okay if I use the message as my translation of the Bible, or should it be the ESV?

[13:39] Do I have to believe in a literal six-day creation? Or can I believe that the days represent a period of time, perhaps millions of years?

And what about spiritual gifts? Have they ceased, or do they continue? And what about membership? And what about baptism?

And what about how we structure the church? And what about music? And what about the songs we sing? And I'm sure you have a lot more to add to the list. You see, the point is, we can all have a different opinion.

But we must be very careful that disputable matters do not end in division. In fact, we must work very hard to keep our unity.

unity. And there are three ways by which we can do this. Because what we want is unity around the gospel, around the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[14:47] So, here's the first thing that we must hold dear and not lose. First, we accept each other because we have been accepted by God.

So, look at verse 1 again. Accept him whose face is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters. You see, the reality is within the life of the church.

We're going to meet fellow believers who don't always agree with us. Ralph and me are both elders. We agree on an awful lot, but there's some things we don't agree on.

But rather than judge and fall out with each other, we accept one another. And we should all accept one another, especially, again, look at verse 1.

Accept him whose face is weak. Now, that does not mean their faith in Christ is in question, and we're wondering, are they really a Christian or not?

[15:51] No, they have faith in Christ. They are most truly God's child. But what it means is the outworking of their faith is still in its infancy.

It's still growing. They are still working out how the gospel relates to these disputable matters. And they're still applying it and still working it through.

So, we must give room to that. So, accept those whose face is weak. So, verse 3, The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not.

And remember, this is specifically a Jewish Gentile context. It's not really about vegetarianism today. So, verse 3, The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not.

And the man who does not eat everything must not condemn. The man who does, for God has accepted him. There's the reason why we accept. Because God has accepted him.

[16:56] And to accept someone means, we don't just put up with them and go, You know, they've just got peculiar views. God bless them. Hmm? No, it means you give them a rich welcome into the family of the church, because that's how God has treated you.

God has welcomed us into his family. He has taken us and accepted us on the basis of our faith in Christ alone, not on our opinion of disputable matters.

So, who am I and who are you to reject those who God has accepted? You see, we don't actually get to decide who we welcome.

We don't stand at the door with a little clipboard and we have all our little list of opinions and go, Sorry, what's your opinion there on creation? What's your view on the tea and coffee issue? Hmm? And give a little tick or an x on the box and, well, if they all line up with you, then you'll talk to them. Now, we don't get to decide who to welcome.

[18:01] God decides who he welcomes. If God has accepted somebody by grace, then we welcome them in grace. We need to be so careful that we don't accept people on the basis that they hold the same opinion as me.

No, at the end of verse 3, we accept each other because God has accepted us both. So that's the first thing we hold dear.

Second, live to please the Lord because we are all under his lordship. Live to please the Lord because we're under his lordship.

Verse 4. Who are you? Or who am I? To judge someone else's servant. You see, we can all take on that kind of role that we act as if, well, I'm the Lord and you're my servant.

In other words, you're answerable to me and I judge you on the basis of whether you agree with my views. And if you don't share my opinion, I don't want to do anything to do with you.

[19:13] But look what it says at the rest of verse 4. To his own master he stands or fall. That is, we don't stand before each other.

We stand before the Lord. And he will stand. The Christian will stand.

Why? Because the Lord is able to make him stand. You see, we're not lords over each other.

Rather, we are all under the lordship of Christ.

Verse 5. One man considers one day more sacred than another. Another man considers, well, every day alike. Each one should be carefully convinced in their own mind.

You see, if my opinion is that Sunday is the same as any other day of the week, and your opinion is that Sunday should be kept really special, then I should not impose or force my view on you.

[20:25] Similarly, if you think that Sunday is more special, and it should be different to every other day of the week, well, then I shouldn't change my opinion just to please you and to kind of fit into your little group.

The point is we are not to impose our views on others and we don't change our views to please others. Instead, look at the end of verse 5, each one should be carefully convinced in his own mind. that means we've got to do a little bit of weighing up and a little bit of thinking through. We must do what is right as far as we can discern before the Lord.

Verse 7, for none of us lives to himself alone, as in we're not answerable to ourselves, 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. In other words, we will be living with him. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. It's so clear through these verses here that it's the Lord who is our master.

[21:45] When we become Christians, we come under his lordship. We belong to him. He is our master. We are his servants. So our desire is to obey the Lord, not each other.

And our aim is to please the Lord, not one another. And we do that as we engage with the Lord's word, with God's word itself.

We read it. We discern it. We pray over it. And we are answerable to him. Verse 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. You see, what really counts, and we can have our discussions and our talks with each other, but what really counts is not what I think.

It's not what you think, but what God thinks. And what God has said in his word. This is our authority.

[22:54] We come under his lordship. We must seek to obey the Lord who died for us. And we seek to please the Lord who was raised to life for us.

So we accept each other because God has accepted us. We live to please the Lord because we are all under his lordship.

And then the third one. We don't judge each other because we will all face the judgment of God. Look at verse 10.

You then. So he's addressing both groups of people within the church, the different sides of the argument.

You then. Why do you judge your brother? Or you over there. Why do you look down on your sister? Well, for we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

[ 24 : 00 ] I think this is a wonderful, this is a great leveller, isn't it, for the church. I am not your judge and you're not my judge. Instead, we are all going to be judged by God.

Sadly, many Christians sit in God's place and they act as judge and jury. They sit like Simon Cowell on Britain's Got Talent ready to press that big red button.

Beep. Get them out of the church. We don't want them in here. They don't have the same opinion as me over some disputable matter. Well, if that's you, let me make it very clear that you are not the judge and neither am I.

God is. Verse 11. As it is written, as surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me and every tongue will confess to God.

You see, it doesn't matter what I think or what you think or even what I think about myself. What matters is what God thinks. And in everything that I do, I obey him and in everything I say, I seek to please him because, verse 12, so then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

[ 25 : 30 ] You see, I am not your judge and God is the judge and I'm going to have to give an account to him and you're going to have to give an account to him.

Just think about it for a minute. If I was your judge, you would stand no chance.

You just wouldn't get in because I am far too critical. You don't match up to all my opinions and views. You just wouldn't get in.

But if God is your judge, then you have great confidence because he is full of grace. We come before God not because I have this view or because I have this opinion.

We stand free before God because we are trusting in Christ, the one who died for us, the one who gave his life for us, the one who lived his life perfectly for us.

[ 26 : 40 ] who has forgiven us and accepted us and welcomed us into his family. So let us not play judge and jury, but let us make sure that you and I are ready to meet our judge with confidence that we are right with the Lord, that we are accepting those around one another because God has accepted them, and that we are living to please the Lord because I am living under his lordship.

The church has been called to a mission. It's a wonderful mission. We'll get to it in a couple of weeks, but the mission is simply this, that we are to announce the gospel, the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ to all people in all places.

But if the church is divided, the message will never go anywhere. But if that mission is to be accomplished, the church must be united.

So let us together as the church family join forces. Let us continue as we seek to do, work at it together, and apply the gospel of grace to one another and to our lives, so that we continue as one people, united together in Christ, reaching the community and reaching the world with the gospel. Let's pray that it does. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 28 : 29 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Let's just take a moment to reflect.

Is there a fellow believer that you judge because they don't hold to your view? Have you a habit of looking down on someone because they don't share your opinion?

Father, would you please forgive me? will you forgive us for the times we become critical and condemning?

Thank you that you have accepted us because of your grace and on the basis of our faith in Jesus Christ, the perfect one.

God, thank you that you have welcomed us into your family, forgiven us and given us the right to become your children.

[ 30 : 09 ] Thank you that you have brought us in together, the variety of people that are here from different backgrounds and cultures and nationalities, yet united through our faith in Christ.

How wonderful, how amazing that is. Father, please, by your Holy Spirit, help us to get rid of every critical and condemning spirit that we have and accept one another as you have accepted us.

we pray that together we will be those who are united in reaching the community and the world with the gospel.

Help us to do that well. Help us to encourage one another. and we thank you so much for the unity of this church, for the family of this church, for the support and the encouragement.

Thank you so much for each other. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.