

Welcome Your Offensive Brother

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[0:00] Alright, as Martin has said, we're reading from Romans chapter 14.! We're starting at verse 1 through to verse 12. As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.

One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 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. 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. 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. The one who observes the day, observes it in honour of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honour of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honour of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 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.

[1:29] For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother?

For we all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

For then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Well, good morning, everyone. Well, will you pray with me as we come to God's word?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, whatever is in our minds from the week past or the week coming, whatever distractions or whatever pain, Lord, I just pray that you would help us to sit in this moment under your word and to be present with one another as we gather together.

Lord, fill us with the greatness of who you are and what you've done, so that we might glorify you with one voice. So please help me as I speak now to be truthful and clear.

[2:49] Help us all to hear you. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, imagine two sisters in the church in Rome.

They're chatting after church and one says, Hey, let's have dinner this week. I'd love to. I'm free on Saturday. And the other lady's face just drops.

You want to cook on the Sabbath? Bit of an awkward pause. The other lady tries to redeem the situation. I didn't know you felt so strongly.

I'm free Tuesday. Can we do Tuesday? Okay, great. So Tuesday comes. She prepares all this food. So excited to have her sister come. She warmly greets her, kisses her, hugs her as she comes in, washes her feet to welcome her.

Those dusty feet, washes them in to welcome her. They recline at the table and on the table there's beef stew and pork with crackling. And she says, Am I supposed to eat that?

[3:55] She's just... She can't believe her eyes. And then she regathers herself and just, where'd you get the beef? Is it kosher?

I've been looking everywhere for kosher beef. In our home, we just eat vegetables. And the host, a bit affronted and a bit self-defensive and just a touch of condescension.

Oh, don't you remember that our Lord declared all foods clean? Don't you remember God's Lord of Moses that our Lord said, not a dot will pass away?

He says that anyone who eats anything unclean will be cut off from God's people. Just have a glass of wine. Let's relax. And then they had this wonderfully encouraging night together and lived happily

ever after.

Now, obviously, I'm taking some poetic license. I have no idea. First century, it's probably not accurate at all. But the situation in the church in Rome, Paul seems to be addressing, is that now that Christ has come, how should a believer treat the Mosaic law?

[5:12] This is a huge question, still a question today. But we might read this chapter at first and go, why does this matter so much to Paul?

Why should this matter so much to us today? He spends a lot of time dealing with it. What's the fuss over vegetables and meat?

Like, if you remember, only a couple of weeks ago, chapter 12, Martin's ranging over so many areas of love. There's just these popcorn commands.

Outdo one another in showing honour and bless those who persecute you. Just one little phrase here, this aspect of life here. Last week, three verses to deal with the whole Old Testament law is summed up in love.

Three verses. And now we've got a chapter and a half dealing with vegetables and wine and days. Why is it such a big deal?

[6:15] And Paul brings in weighty theology. This is deep theology that he brings in to deal with these issues. God has welcomed you.

Jesus is Lord. We will stand before God as judge. Why do we need such weighty theology for wine and vegetables? Why does this matter so much?

This passage is framed, 14 verse 1, 15 verse 7 or 5 to 7. It's framed. The one weak in faith welcome him.

And I think we see the purpose and why this matters so much. 15 verse 5 to 7. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another.

In accord with Christ Jesus. That together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

[7:33] The glory of God is at stake in these issues. The cross of Jesus has broken down the hostility vertically between us and God.

We have peace with God. And he's broken down the hostility between one another. Even the differences between Jew and Gentile. We have peace with one another.

The display of the power of the cross to bring true peace to the glory of God is at stake here. We must be unified as believers to glorify God.

Paul mentions it in every letter. It is, you can't miss it once you go looking for it. But he knows how hard it is for people with sin, people who have a tendency towards rules or a tendency towards insisting on rights.

He knows the barriers to unity. It takes more than a general desire to get on for this church to have unity.

[8:46] It takes more than being pragmatic, trying to just go, well, let's meet some compromise in the middle. There's going to be some things that deeply offend you that others do.

I think it takes more than positive language. Brother, sister, church family. It takes more. I love using that language, but it takes more than that. It takes more than doctrinal standards and shared convictions on how to live the Christian life because as soon as you do that, now we need doctrinal standards.

I'm not saying we shouldn't, but we need more than that because usually that tends to your circle of who you will have fellowship with is smaller than who Christ is willing to have fellowship with.

There's a problem there. What will give us true harmony in this church family and across churches in the Hunter and more widely?

When some churches believe it's wrong, what we just did before I started speaking, in using all these instruments that aren't in Scripture, or it's wrong to have women read and pray up front?

[10:08] When other churches have female pastors and sing Bethel songs, how do we have harmony in this church family across cultural differences and traditions?

Where's the place? I know we're all going to feel uncomfortable when I'm finished speaking here, but tattoos and piercings. Is that right? Is that wrong? Drinking alcohol? Is that a mark of spirituality or not?

Some of you wearing thongs? Should you be wearing thongs? We are meeting before the creator of the universe. Is it okay to take a shift at work on a Sunday?

Should men have long hair? Women have short hair? How do we have harmony across families in this church when that family lets their kids watch Harry Potter?

You're entertained by witchcraft? We haven't even got to doctrine, have we? Evolution?

[11:27] Evolution? Creation? Is it literal seven days? Baptism? Eschatology? I wasn't going to mention that. Thank you, Roy. Talk to Rob if you want to talk about eschatology at the end.

Calvinism? Arminianism? Have the spiritual gifts ceased at the end of the New Testament, or do they continue today? Some of these differences run really deep, and they're unlikely to be fully resolved in our lifetime.

But if we see God's heart in chapter 15, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

We need power to do that. And our passage is going to give that to us. I think we can have two extremes, two categories of thinking, that it's right to be wary of these two.

One is legalism, as if what you do adds to your salvation. But Paul is, the situation is not, these people think they're adding to their salvation.

[12:45] He would be much stronger here, like he is in Galatians. But if you're saying that, that's a different gospel. He spent all of Romans talking about, we're justified by faith.

These are not, they're not saying you need to do works to be saved. But they are convicted there is a right way to live.

So there's legalism. But then there's another extreme of, we can just soak up our society's highest ethic that is above all other ethics, personal freedom. As if God's word has nothing to say about whether you watch Harry Potter or not.

It does have something to say. So are we just going along with our culture? Or is there legalism? If we're going to have true harmony, we need to be able to say more than, you're being legalistic, or you're insisting on personal freedom, just like the world does.

As we spend two weeks in Romans 14 and 15, we are given massive divine power to be unified, to glorify God with one voice.

[14:02] And the way Paul does that is, we need to think the massive truths of the gospel to have the power to welcome one another. It's not just, I'm going to be kind. You need the gospel to fill your mind in order to welcome.

So verses one to three, God has welcomed you, or God has welcomed you. Verse four to nine, Christ is Lord of each believer. Verse 10 to 12, we will each give an account to God.

So let's go through just verses one to 12 today. He talks about weak in faith and strong in faith. I don't think any of us want to think of ourselves as I'm weak in faith.

It's not weak as in they don't trust Jesus for salvation. They are brothers, they are sisters, they do trust Jesus. It's not that they're necessarily weak in that they don't know their Bibles.

They do know their Bibles, which is why they're not doing these sorts of things. And I'm assuming some would be very articulate, perhaps forceful, going, here's my argument, why not?

[15:12] So it's not weak in those senses. To be weak or strong in faith seems to mean working out the implications of the gospel.

Now, generally speaking, we should probably picture Jews and Gentiles here. Not exclusively so, but Jews and Gentiles being unified is throughout Romans.

It's very important to Paul. You can imagine, many Jewish believers from childhood have known the importance of not eating certain foods and keeping the Sabbath.

You need to be clean before a holy God. Now, it could be Gentiles who have seen the beauty of those laws.

So I'm not saying it's exclusively Jews who are the weak, but you could, I think, just so we can picture it, that's the general division going on in the church in Rome.

[16:18] By saying some are weak and others are strong, Paul is agreeing in principle with the strong. Verse 14, we didn't read this, but verse 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's unclean.

Verse 17, for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. It's not on that plane of, that's not what the Christian life is about, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

In principle, Paul is agreeing with those who understand the implications of the gospel, but he spends very little time defending that or persuading of that.

He cares much more about the peace and mutual upbuilding. He cares about the attitude behind or beneath this topic.

So verse 2, verse 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.

[17:41] Those seeing certain behaviours as wrong, when they see other believers doing those wrong things, they're judging, they're cutting them out.

They see themselves as upholding righteous standards. Now, we all must judge. You have to judge if you're going to obey the Bible.

We have to, because we've got to discern the will of God. We have to help each other in exhorting each other to let go of certain sins. We have to, if someone's totally repentant, unrepentant, we may need to discipline for their good.

We need to avoid false teaching. We're making judgments all the time. We have to judge to love one another. But this is on disputable matters.

This is cutting off someone from fellowship who is a brother or sister. Years ago, uni days, I was working at a small gym.

[18:51] Don used to go to the gym and he put in a good word. Thanks, Don. It was a really small gym and sometimes you just have one person there that's doing the workout.

This one guy came and we're chatting while we're doing the workout and it was really pleasant to find out we both went to church. But then he found out I didn't speak in tongues. He said some comment to the effect that I'm not sure you are a brother.

I was probably 20 at the time and that was very unsettling to say the least. It's that cutting off on matters that God doesn't cut us off on those matters.

But then the strong in faith are not strong in love. They're despising. They're looking down on and treating as less less of worth and they're feeling superior to.

There was a phrase I heard in my church circles growing up and I probably used it a whole bunch of times a happy clappy church. Do you remember that phrase? Do you hear the superiority in that despising comment?

[20:22] Oh that's a happy clappy church. Should Jesus not make us happy? The cross deserves a few claps.

Now I've got my convictions on spiritual gifts and things but it's the despising nature of it that's the problem.

This condemning superior distancing yourself from fellowship. We may not be hung up on vegetables so much today but this is alive and well unfortunately isn't it?

Instead we're commanded to welcome. That's not just put up with but it's bring into your inner circle.

Don't welcome he says to argue don't try and pin someone down over morning tea to persuade them make sure they agree with you on X Y and Z it's not welcome so you argue but it's welcome into that inner circle we've all tasted to one degree or another how cold it is to be there's a circle of those who are in and you're on the out that is a cold place to be we've all experienced it some worse than others the reason we're to welcome the power to welcome is verse three God has welcomed him if all my thoughts for the past week were just displayed on in audio visual display right now just for the past week

I would I don't think I could step back in here I would find a hole to hide in and yet God Father Son and Holy Spirit sees all that and simply because of Jesus that is the circle of all circles to be in Father Son and Holy Spirit and I'm in I'm not saying I'm God I'm not part of the God head but he has accepted me I'm in you're in you're welcome because of Jesus you're accepted you're loved you're adopted you're united to Christ's husband the Spirit has made his home in you we're in that circle of all circles we're accepted by God but can we accept each other we are at peace with God but can we live at peace with each other welcome so we've got to fill our minds with the gospel the second thing verse four to nine fill our minds with the gospel

[23:37] Christ is Lord of each believer when we're tempted to distance ourselves from a brother who offends us we should feel the sting of his question who are you who are you to judge now our society loves that phrase who are you to judge but the inference when our society uses it is I have the right to decide what I do Paul is not saying that there is someone who has the right to judge you it's just not you who has the right to judge we have a Lord before whom each servant will stand or

fall and before that troubles you and makes you afraid verse four we have assurance our Lord will he will be upheld for the Lord is able to make him stand it's not based on us keeping certain rules that make sure we stand before

Jesus he upholds us he will make sure we stand we do have a look he picks up another contentious issue at that time and it's still contentious today like should a believer keep the Sabbath and other holy days now surprisingly Paul doesn't he doesn't enforce one position each one should be fully convinced in his own mind verse six the one who observes the day observes it in honour of the Lord and the inference there the one who treats all days as holy is doing it for the Lord's sake he is inferring there that he's on the side of the strong but the main thing is that you do it for the Lord's sake he emphasised each believer must be thoroughly convinced in his own mind we're not just to go along with our culture unthinkingly oh well other people do stuff on a Sunday I suppose it's okay we're not known to be unthinking we've got to look at scripture and what does the Bible have to say about the Sabbath does creation and the Ten Commandments mean the Sabbath still is in force or because of what Hebrew says we enter that spiritual rest all days are meant to be holy to the Lord we're at peace now personally I'm persuaded of the latter and I think Paul is too but anyway!

just go oh yeah do whatever have reasons biblical reasons for what you're persuaded on but he's I think he's urging us look beneath the surface of the issue the one who observes the Sabbath look at the devotion to the Lord they're doing it for the Lord's sake you may disagree on that but they're doing it for the Lord so the one who observes the day observes it in honour of the Lord the one who eats in honour of the Lord since he gives thanks to God or the one who abstains from food abstains in honour of the Lord and gives thanks to God for none of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself for if we live we live to the Lord and we disagree on look beneath the surface and there's devotion there there's common shared devotion to the

Lord and thanksgiving to God the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection is that he might establish himself as Lord of everything in our lives I don't have the right to be your Lord I didn't die for you but he is each of our Lord because he did die for us and rise again I struggle to understand what does dying to the Lord mean I think reading John 21 helped me this week if you remember after his resurrection he says to Peter that when he's old he's going to be taken where he doesn't want to go and that was to say what kind of death he was going to die to glorify God and then John Peter asked what's going to happen to John and

[28:42] Jesus says if it is my will that he remains until I come it struck me do you hear what he's claiming there it's my will when John dies it's my will Peter when and how you're going to die and to give glory to God through that he's lord of our life in everything even to the point of death like if I was to do a survey of this room we have lots of differences in this room as I've mentioned some of them earlier but if I was to do a survey do you believe that Jesus has the right to decide when you die and you want your death to be trusting him and bring glory to him every believer who knows he's died for you we trust him we would say yes and that is good if we look beneath the surface of all these issues we disagree on there's devotion there to the

Lord all of life even to the point of death so we must please our living Lord who died for us according to our conscience if we look beneath the surface we can see Christ is Lord in what each of us are doing so God has welcomed us even that offensive brother that you I don't know how they can live that way God is welcomed someone is acting on convictions that you disagree with they're doing it because Jesus is their Lord they're doing it in devotion to him and the third gospel truth that's got to fill our minds at verse 10 to 12 is our common shared faith in the future we will each stand before the judgment seat of God

I've given testimony in a courtroom before and it's a very intimidating environment and rightly so because justice is a serious matter I've experienced at school being called into the head office to give an account Paul knows the experience of standing before the judgment seat of at least two Roman governors who wielded the sword that would have been an intimidating judgment seat to stand in front of but it's tiny it is tiny compared to what we believe we will stand before our creator verse 10 to 12 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 for it is written as I live says the Lord every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to

God so then each of us will give an account of himself to God you hear the emphasis there all will stand every knee shall bow every tongue will praise every tongue will confess each of us will give

an account I'm not going to give an account of how you lived but I will give an account of myself why is it good for us as Christians to think of this day it's scary but we've got to remember verse four our Lord is able to make us stand we know we're justified by faith we know we're declared righteous already we will pass that judgment so why is it good to fill your mind fill our minds with that day let's just imagine how I don't know how you're going to do this

I'm going to ask the impossible right now but imagine how majestic that throne is that I'm going to be standing before now imagine someone pulls over one of those blue chairs you're sitting on and plonks themselves down next to that majestic throne and they are declaring judgment over you cutting you off for something you're doing whoever it is you're imagining sitting on that little blue chair it could be your parents it could be your spouse it could be really dear friends but the surprising remedy to fearing their verdict on you is to remember remember the greatness of the one you actually will answer to his verdict that's the only one that matters it sets you free

[34:05] I must do what pleases him it gives freedom to live in pleasing the Lord I want him to say well done someone dear to you might cut you off but he you gotta imagine that day well done and do you see that little blue chair next to the majestic throne how ridiculous it is and presumptuous that you dare help God judge I will be standing I will not be sitting I think Paul might be adding this in because we will give an account for those despising condemning words and if we remember that judgment seat and how majestic it is when I see a brother or sister doing something I disagree with we should want them to act according to their conscience the deepest thing we should desire is we know they have to give an account to

God so it's powerful it sets us free it convicts us of when we're judging when it is not our place and it helps us go yes act according to your conscience we can speak into each other's conscience by the way we'll say more on this next week until you're convinced by God's word we need to act on conscience well these are powerful this is the only power I think to have true peace is filling our minds with the gospel during the mass revivals of the great awakening across England and America 18th century God used two men in particular he used others of course but there was John Wesley who was an Arminian who taught that someone's got to choose Jesus before they're saved and then there was George Whitefield who was a Calvinist who repeatedly urged his audience you must be born again for you to respond in faith and a devoted!

Whitefield the Calvinist once asked will we see John Wesley in heaven? Whitefield replied he will be so near the throne and we shall be at such a distance that we shall hardly get a sight of him that's a big disagreement but the affection the respect of his devotion to God God we have been welcomed into that inner circle father son and holy spirit

Christ is lord of each believer of all we do life and death and we gotta live to please him because it's to him we gotta give an account so let us welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God will you pray with me let's pray father forgive us for those words and those actions even if it's just ignoring someone that has treated a son or daughter a brother or sister of yours for whom you died with such despising and cutting off actions and behaviour forgive us for that

[39:00] Lord father I pray that you would make this church more unified may we honour each other's conscience may we speak the truth in love to each other but may we express that welcome that you have given us and may we see the devotion beneath the difference father I pray this for your glory I pray that you would make this church even more diverse and as you do that fill us with the gospel otherwise we'll divide so please do this for the glory of your name and for our good in Jesus name Amen .