

## Living by Grace, Walking in Love – 4<sup>th</sup> August 2013

### **Romans 14:1-13**

One of the inspiring things about being a Christian and belonging to a fellowship like this is the amazing diversity of its members

We are all so different;

Coming from vastly different backgrounds and having differing experiences of life;

God has called us together, the *ekklesia*, or the church

United in Christ, born of His Spirit, to live and work together in unity

Or that's the ideal isn't it – It's what we are working towards

Have you noticed it doesn't always work the way it should be

#### **Slide:**

Jesus in his High Priestly prayer before going to Cross prayed for all believers to know this unity

However, throughout the history of the church there have been debates and arguments over doctrine and theology

Churches have divided and split over internal disputes

Whatever way you look at it conflict has played its part in the Church's history

However, not all disagreements are evil

Jesus prayed for unity, ***not uniformity***

We are not the same and will never see everything from the same perspective

Ultimately it's how we deal with our differences that matter, as genuine debate can lead to greater unity in the end

Differences do not have to lead to dispute and division

*“Paul recognised that differences can lead to disunity and disharmony if not addressed”*

And two hot potatoes of contention in the Rome church focussed around two issues

There could have been more issues but two are addressed - ***“diet” and “days”***

The Rome church was made up of converted Gentiles and Jews

They would have come to Christ from completely different backgrounds

One group believes it's ok to eat anything and others coming from an idolatrous past consider the eating of meats which may have been offered to false gods as repulsive and harmful to their walk with God

Here the “weak” seem to be recent Jewish Christians, who have not yet been able to become free from the ritual ceremonial laws concerning clean or unclean foods, *Rom 14:1-6*

These Jews would have been taught the importance of the Sabbath and of the Jewish festivals

Placing a special emphasis on these days was part of their culture and heritage

It's likely that Gentile believers seeing their Jewish brethren placing such emphasis on such days may have considered them as being idolatrous

Those who stand in tension with the weak are most likely Gentile Christians, Their pasts would not have entertained the thought of "unclean foods" or of special days to be observed.

Their conflict with each other apparently manifested itself in an attitude of haughtiness or spiritual superiority by the Gentile believers and a condemning, judgmental spirit toward them by Jewish believers

Paul comes down hard on both for three reasons:

1) God has already accepted both *Rom 14:3*

*They are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ*

2) We are ultimately accountable in these matters to God and not subject to each other's limited perspectives *Rom 14:4, 10-12* and

3) Participation in the kingdom of God is not determined by what we eat or drink; therefore abstaining or partaking is not a cause to judge one another *Rom 14:13, 17*

*Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters; 14:1*

*"Paul notes that some issues have the capacity to divide people into two groups.*

*Some he calls weak in faith"*

The term *weak* literally means frail or feeble

For example, someone who has injured their legs badly has to allow a considerable time for the legs to be rested and to heal

When they are in the place to walk again they find they are "*wobbly*" on their legs, as the muscles in the legs have become weak through underuse

Weakness has taken its toll

Paul says the "strong" are to accept (or receive to themselves) those that are weak

*"They must be accepted unconditionally, just as they are, without any expectation of change"*

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. 14:5 NIV

Bible commentator Marshall Hayden comments on us judging our brother or sister in Christ:

*Both of us are guests at His table. Who would be rude enough to criticize another guest at a meal for which you were not the host?*

*The Message, paraphrases this section (14:5)*

***“Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God’s welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.”***

*At Sunday worship, we are gathered to express our honor to God. The others to whom we relate are His servants, not ours. That says something about the way we dress; but it also says something about the way we evaluate the way someone else might be dressed. I am not the master to whom another must give account.*

Ultimately in whatever we do or say we all give an account to God

He is our Master and Lord

We are not to be the judge and jury over others

Even if we fall He is able to make us stand!

We must understand Paul is not using this term weak in a completely negative way

**All of us**, are “weak in faith” in some area

*“In some ways the person of weak faith may be more mature and stronger than his peers. However, his faith will always be weak in the area of his deepest need”*

The weak need to be strengthened in their area of weakness

Whilst the strong need to be considerate of those whose faith is weak in certain areas

**Slide: The question of conscience:**

God is the one who is in the process of transforming us

We must not be tempted to speed up His work of sanctification in those around us

*(Sanctification is an ongoing process in all believers; where we are being separated from the influence of the world and the flesh to become more Christ like)*

Our conscience is God given to enable us to distinguish right from wrong

Unfortunately before becoming to Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit our conscience was

*“Like a broken compass, being pulled this way and that.*

*However, in God and with the Holy Spirit we can now find true North with increasing accuracy.*

*Our consciences are being gradually transformed by the Holy Spirit to reflect the mind of Christ” - Chuck Swindoll*

There are behaviours which are sinful and scripture informs us are morally wrong

Sexual sins, stealing from another, lying and the like

Scripture gives us clear direction in these areas, *Ps 23:3*

However, not all issues are so clear cut

*“Matters concerning things where there is no clear scriptural teaching are morally neutral”*

They might be unwise, but they are not sin

Although not sinful in them self, our conscience will either condone or condemn them, depending where we are in our walk with Christ

There were times when going dancing, to the cinema, drinking alcohol would have been strictly off limits

Another grey area would be what music can we listen to?

We have to learn to be sensitive the Holy Spirits leading in these areas for ourselves

Its foolishness to think new believers will behave like mature Christians overnight

***Our desire to do the right thing needs to come from within;***

From a transformed conscience and a heart which is looking to please God through our love for him and not through trying to meet the expectations of others

**Slide:**

*You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? 14:10 NIV*

Paul poses two rhetorical questions in verses nine & ten

*“Why do you judge your brother”? And*

*“Why do you regard with contempt your brother” NKJ – “Look down on your brother” NIV*

Contempt for your brother means to despise someone or something on the basis that it is worthless or of no value

### **Slide: Judging**

Paul rebuked the believers at Corinth for allowing sexual immorality to go unchecked in the church

He said he had passed judgment on the offender and told the congregation to cease fellowship with him, *1 Cor 5:3*

This was not only to protect the integrity of the church but allow time for the man to repent and be ultimately to be fully restored in himself and with the church

Even in this act of **tough love** Paul was looking to the wellbeing of the church as well as the wellbeing of the man involved

At times sin has to be dealt with in this way

It has to be cut out before it spreads throughout the body

However, the use of the word judging in the context of *14:10*,

*“Why do you judge your brother?”* has no positive element

It is only negative and cruel

We are not in a position to judge

### **Slide:**

1. We can never know all the facts
2. We are not objective – our judgment can be tainted by self interest
3. We are not perfect – our judgment is hypocritical
4. We are not God – our judgment has no jurisdiction

Only God is able to judge wisely and fairly

Paul reminds us that we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ;

*It is written: “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.”* *14:11 - Isaiah 45:23*

If we want to help fellow believers along we must set them free from demands  
Supply what they lack in building them up

### **Application:**

#### **1. A life of grace begins with mutual acceptance**

We may not always agree with another’s opinions or ideas but we should never reject the person who holds them

*“Acceptance delights in the delight of another”*

Acceptance allows people to feel safe in who they are even if poor behaviour must be reprovved or challenged

There may be times when we have to confront another in a Godly way, when there is obvious error

This may lead to separation, which isn’t pleasant but is right

*“Acceptance does not require truth to be set aside or sin to be ignored.  
Acceptance calls for truth and love to guide our relationships”*

**2. An attitude of grace requires releases others to who God wants them to be**

If someone has harmed us we need to release that person to God for their actions

Leaving judgment and mercy in the Lord`s hands

We can confront others but not to be their judge or to try to do the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives

We must allow God to work in their lives for the benefit of all

We will all stand before God and be judged on our actions and motivations

Not someone else`s

**3. A commitment to grace forbids one to become the judge of another**

I am not omniscient

To judge correctly I need all the facts

I struggle to make wise decisions for my own life, let alone someone else`s

I cannot be completely objective

I am biased, I am selfish, I am finite

God sees the whole picture and when He makes decisions he takes every factor in the universe into account

I cannot do that due to my sinfulness and limited understanding

I can condemn, but I cannot redeem

God`s way is always that of redemption

The Holy Spirit can convict of sin and transform a soul

My condemnation offers only rejection

*Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother`s way.*

*14:13 NIV*

Having shown that both the strong and the weak are to be faulted for their attitude toward each other, *Rom 14:10*

Paul nonetheless surfaces a special concern for the weak ones, *Rom 14:15-16*

*If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.*

14:15 NIV

*Paul is not simply concerned about offending others by doing something with which they disagree, or which they see as inappropriate or unacceptable for Christians*

*Rather, he is concerned about the eternal welfare of these “weak” Christians, about acts which cause them to fall in their spiritual journey, The injury caused is emotional, not physical; relational not spiritual*

**Slide:** (1 Cor 8:9, 11-13; 10:32).

Paul does not tell us how to discern, specifically, when our conduct will bring injury to a fellow believer’s spiritual life and possibly to a falling into sin’s sphere of domination

However, when our lives are lived in fellowship with Christ, driven by his love, seeking to imitate his life, then we will have the kind of sensitivity to each other which will prevent us from harmful acts

It all comes down to love for each other

**Slide:**

The remedy is to walk in love,

*If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love; Rom 14:15*

We are to act in ways that build each other up rather than in ways that tear each other down; *Rom 14:19-20*

In ways that hold each other up and help each other along rather than in ways that cause others “to stumble” and “to fall”

*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 14:17 NIV*

Christianity is more than about focussing on our external differences that have no eternal values

**Conclusion:** *Marshall Hayden*

*Let’s put what Paul says in some of our words.*

*“You are really different from each other. Some are stronger, some are weaker. Some are long-timers and some are short-termers. Some are insightful and some are fearful. You wear different things, you eat different things, and you spend time in different ways. You bring to God different kinds of sacrifices. Just remember! Each of you is alive if you have entrusted your life to Christ, even if that trust comes out looking different in each of you. You are not in charge of each other, but your brotherhood really counts. So, make every effort to do*

*what leads to peace and to a mutual building up. Up! I said up! God is first. And you count!  
Amen!*