

SESSION 12

Unity

ROMANS 14:5-20

BELIEVERS PROMOTE UNITY BY ACCEPTING AND EDIFYING ONE ANOTHER.



One day, a teacher invited her students to debate an issue that had surfaced in class. The students immediately began sharing their viewpoints, and the discussion quickly grew intense. As the debate escalated, the teacher noticed that while the students were passionate about their perspectives, their disagreements were becoming disrespectful. At that moment, she challenged them to disagree agreeably. Paul did the same—because of Christ.

*WHEN HAVE YOU FOUND YOURSELF NEEDING TO DISAGREE WITH SOMEONE
IN A RESPECTFUL WAY? WHAT MADE IT CHALLENGING?*

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Believers in Rome found themselves divided over matters such as dietary rules and the observance of special days. Those from Jewish backgrounds often disagreed with their Gentile brothers and sisters about how to handle these issues. Paul reminded them of a crucial truth: they were not to appoint themselves as judges over fellow believers whose convictions differed on these secondary matters. Each believer served the Lord, and He alone held the authority to judge them.

Rather than dwelling on their disagreements, Paul urged them to keep their focus on Jesus. Honoring Him was what mattered most. Because of this, they were wise to bring their personal convictions before Him, seeking His approval. They also honored Christ by respecting the opinions of others within the church. Serving Him together was more important than debating differences over non-essential concerns. This unity would lead them toward spiritual maturity and allow them to experience the joy and peace that flow from a close relationship with Him. Such mutual

respect would be possible only when believers allowed love to guide them. Love creates space for differing opinions. Love also motivates believers to build one another up.

Jewish believers had the privilege of receiving God's law and His promise of the Messiah, while Gentile believers had the privilege of hearing the good news of Christ. Both groups were fully welcomed into God's family. To emphasize this, Paul pointed to Old Testament passages that affirmed God's plan to include both Jewish and Gentile believers as spiritual brothers and sisters in Him.



5 One person judges **one day**^A to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced **in his own mind**. **B** **6** Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord. **Whoever eats**, ^C eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it, and he gives thanks to God. **7** For none of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself. **8** If we live, **we live for the Lord**; ^D and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. **9** Christ died and returned to life for this: that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living. **10** But you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you, why do you **despise** ^E your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the **judgment seat**^F of God. **11** For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God. **12** So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. **13** Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister. **14** I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that **nothing is unclean in itself**. ^G Still, to someone who considers a thing to be unclean, to that one it is unclean. **15** For if your brother or sister is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love. **Do not destroy**, ^H by what you eat, someone for whom Christ died. **16** Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, **17** for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. **18** Whoever serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and receives human approval. **19** So then, let us **pursue what promotes peace** ^I and what builds up one another. **20** Do not tear down God's work because of food. Everything is clean, but it is wrong to make someone fall by what he eats.

A. Some Roman believers, likely Jews, viewed Sabbath and holidays as sacred. In contrast, Gentiles treated "every day . . . the same."

B. Paul sought unity within the body, but not uniformity. Believers needed to leave room for grace in areas of conscience and conviction.

C. Dietary restrictions (possibly related to Old Testament laws or meat offered to idols) were another potential point of tension between Jews and Gentiles.

D. In "disputed matters" (v. 1), believers must not judge the efforts of others to please God. Everyone is accountable to God.

E. More than a passing dislike, but seeing someone as nothing or without value.

F. Not a judgment of salvation, but accountability for the quality of one's works (v. 12).

G. Jesus declared all things clean (Mark 7:17-19) and reaffirmed it to Peter (Acts 10:9-16). But believers still must respect others' convictions.

H. Abolish, ruin, or make helpless. In Luke 15, Jesus used a similar verb to describe a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son.

I. The goal of Christian conduct includes building unity within the body and encouraging the faith of individuals.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Disagreement

(Rom. 14:5-8)

Believers should allow other believers to express their love for God as God directs them.

- **What kind of spiritual practices might believers disagree over today? How can we implement Paul's instruction when we encounter disagreements like these?**

2. Accountability

(Rom. 14:9-12)

Every person will be held accountable for their actions and choices.

- **How should these verses shape our understanding of God and His desire for our lives?**
- **When you disagree with another believer, how does the gospel factor into your response and attitude?**

3. Love

(Rom. 14:13-18)

As members of the body of Christ, we're to spur on each other to spiritual growth.

- **What practical things can we do to spur on others and not be a stumbling block?**

4. Edification

(Rom. 14:19-20)

Believers are to build up one another, pursuing peace in our relationships with other believers.

- **Why is peace so significant in the body of Christ? What might we forfeit if strife or dissension are allowed to grow?**

Apply the Text

Discuss with your Bible study group current issues that resemble the dietary laws and special days in Paul's day.

- **How can your group handle these differing convictions in a way that promotes unity and builds one another up, rather than creating frustration or division?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

The Church

Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. (See Ephesians 2:19-22; Colossians 1:18.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use another Bible passage to understand the focal passage.

Read Acts 10:9-16. Summarize the vision that Peter had about clean and unclean foods. How did God use that vision to help Peter understand that he should also take the gospel to Cornelius and the other Gentiles in Caesarea (see Acts 10:1-8)? Compare that with Galatians 2, where issues of circumcision and eating with the Jews caused division in the church. How did Paul respond to each of these issues?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Romans 14:19. What's one thing that helps you feel like you belong in a group, even when people don't all think alike?

After addressing disputes between believers over food and sacred days (Rom. 14:1-18), Paul summarized the goal: believers are to intentionally pursue what promotes peace and builds one another up. Unity and spiritual growth take precedence over winning arguments or proving maturity.

What two things did Paul call believers to pursue? Why do you think he used such active language rather than passive language?

When we pursue something, we don't just hope it happens—we go after it on purpose. Paul encouraged the church to make peace its intentional aim and to work toward what strengthens unity. In a church made up of people with different backgrounds, preferences, and perspectives, peace doesn't just happen naturally or by default. It takes intentional choices and ongoing effort. At the same time, we are to actively look for ways to build one another up. When we choose encouragement over criticism and others' growth over personal preference, the church becomes a place where people are strengthened in their faith and unity is nurtured.

Discuss ways your group and church can intentionally foster an environment that builds people up.

Place Romans 14:19 on your phones or on cards and memorize it together.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Romans 14:5-8

Look for the repeated phrase in these verses.

In verses 1-4, Paul addressed tensions in the Roman church—especially between Jewish and Gentile believers—over disputable matters such as food laws. In addition to tensions over food laws, he addressed divisions over holy days. One person “judges one day to be more important than another day,” while someone else “judges every day to be the same.” Most likely, Jews in the church at Rome were observing the Sabbath and other important feast days. Others in the church, likely Gentile believers, did not feel any obligation to a religious calendar. While not all believers held the same convictions, every believer had the responsibility to honor the Lord. Those who chose to observe certain days or eat certain foods were to do so in ways that honored God. Likewise, those who chose not to eat those foods or observe those days were to abstain in ways that honored the Lord. Note the repetition of the phrase, “for the Lord.”

Believers today continue to deal with tensions that stem from conflicting convictions. Unity in Christ does not mean that we must agree on every issue that comes up in the church. We diminish the tension when we remember that we are accountable to the Lord. If we seek to honor Him with our convictions, we’re more willing to respect others in the church who also want to honor Him—albeit in different ways.

What does living “for the Lord” look like in your everyday life?



Day 2: Romans 14:9-10

Pay attention to the warning in verse 10.

All of Paul’s readers had one thing in common: they confessed Jesus as Lord. What united them was far greater than any secondary differences that might divide them. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus frees believers from condemnation. For that reason, no Christian has the right to impose bondage on a fellow believer whom Christ has already set free.

To drive the point home, Paul asked two rhetorical questions. First, why would a believer “judge your brother or sister”? Second, why would a believer “despise your brother or sister”? We are not permitted to sit in judgment over those who hold different convictions, nor are we free to treat them with contempt. Both attitudes are out of place in the body of Christ.

Paul then reminded his readers of a sobering truth: each one of us will one day stand before the judgment seat of God. This judgment will not determine salvation but will evaluate our faithfulness to the Lord. In light of this reality, believers should extend grace, not judgment, to one another.

How does remembering the judgment seat of God change the way you relate to other believers?



Day 3: Romans 14:11-12

Compare these verses to Philippians 2:10-11.

Paul quoted Isaiah 45:23 to remind his readers that “every knee will bow” before God and “every tongue will give praise” to Him. This was to remind his readers that He is Lord—and Judge—over everyone and everything.

In writing to the Philippians, Paul emphasized how Jesus humbled Himself on a cross, God raised Him up, every knee will bow before Him and every mouth will confess His authority (Phil. 2:5-11). The context of Philippians was similar to our passage in Romans. The Philippian church had also been struggling with a lack of unity and judgmental attitudes (Phil. 2:1-4). Whether it’s the church at Rome, Philippi, or the church you attend today—the answer is the same. What unites us is the gospel. Grounded in the gospel, we are to nurture unity—not create division. In verse 12, Paul highlighted our motive: each of us will one day “give an account” of ourselves to God.

How do these verses shape your understanding of God and His desire for your life?



Day 4: Romans 14:13-18

Note the connection between love and freedom.

“I know and am persuaded,” said Paul, that “nothing is unclean in itself.” Jesus had “declared all foods clean” (Mark 7:19). Paul understood this, but not all believers did. He explained that we must consider the brother or sister who thinks differently than us. If we selfishly ignore their convictions and press our freedom to eat what they call unclean, we will hurt those who think differently. Therefore, Paul encouraged that in the interest of love, we are to patiently lay aside our rights to await growth in others.

The kingdom of God is not about petty things like “eating and drinking.” Rather, it’s about “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Paul urged the Romans to focus not on secondary matters but on the greater priorities—the spiritual growth the Spirit was bringing about in weaker believers.

When we choose to limit our freedom for the sake of someone else’s spiritual growth, we are serving both Christ and our fellow believers. “Whoever serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God.” Additionally, by limiting our freedom we will receive “human approval.” This reminds us that other believers are watching us, and our choices can either harm them or help strengthen their faith.

What practical things can you do to spur on others and not be a stumbling block?



Day 5: Romans 14:19-20

Identify the two goals believers are to pursue.

Paul urged believers to “pursue what promotes peace and builds up one another.” We promote peace when we do everything possible to build up each other as we work together in God’s family. We are to pursue what builds up other believers. Overlooking our responsibility to edify one another has a damaging effect on God’s work. Instead of focusing our attention on doing His work together, we’ll get sidetracked pitting ourselves against one another with our petty disagreements. By referring to food, Paul’s instruction underscores the temptation to give primary concern to secondary issues. The rules about food in Paul’s day call to mind a number of secondary issues in our day. Disagreements over secondary issues can distract us from the primary work that centers in the gospel.

Growing past the points of disagreement means moving beyond the notion that serving the Lord only consists of keeping rules and honoring rituals. Getting beyond such notions involves handling disagreements in a way that builds up believers as we live for Christ together. Mature believers don’t want to do anything that would cause a brother or sister in Christ to fall into confusion regarding what matters most in serving the Lord.

Where in your relationships do you need to intentionally “pursue what promotes peace”?

APPLY THE TEXT

Consider what it might look like to prioritize someone else’s spiritual growth over your own freedom or comfort. What is one practical step you can take this week to build up another believer in their walk with Christ?

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