

# Romans 14:1-15:8

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's really easy to imagine that this world would somehow be far better if there were no disagreements and no arguments.

! It's easy to think that the world would be better if it was like that. Difference and conflict are often a cause of tension and strain in life.

And often we long to live without tension. And so I think it comes as a surprise to you and I that when we get to Romans 14 and 15 that God actually has a very, very good purpose.

Lying behind certain differences between people in this church family. Just look at verse 1 of chapter 14 and you really get the simple teaching of the whole section. Look with me at it because it says it all.

Let, as for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him but not to quarrel over opinions. And that's what we're to do. And if you jump on to chapter 15 and verse 6, it's on your sheets there.

[ 1 : 19 ] It says, it comes to the reason why we should accept those whose faith is weak. And the reason is after lots of discussion, chapter 15 verse 6, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the reason is stated for a second time in verse 9 of Romans chapter 15. Let me just turn there. You haven't got it on your sheets, but I've got it in my Bible. Romans 9 verse 15. Where it says, For he says to... No, that's not. That's Romans 9 verse 15.

It should be verse 15 of Romans 13. But we'll gather in the end. There's no verse 13 of Romans... Verse 9 of Romans chapter 13. What am I talking about? What am I talking about?

Let me look at my notes. This is a disaster as well. It's the problem. Verse 9 of chapter 15. That's right. Here we go. And in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

[ 2 : 20 ] As it is written, Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing to your name. So when you take those verses together, You see Paul is saying, You show one another mercy, So that the Gentiles, the outsiders, May glorify God.

They might praise God for his mercy. So in this passage that we've read, Paul tells us not only what to do, Accept him whose faith is weak, But he also tells us why we must do that.

We should do it. We should accept those whose faith are weak, Because it gives glory to God. And that's the simple outline of this part of the letter. And it should come as something of a relief to you and I.

It is never God's intention To have within the church, To have within the local church, Some kind of neutral, Monotone, monochrome existence.

Where everybody thinks in exactly the same way about everything. Where everyone lives in exactly the same way as everyone else. Where everyone looks like everyone else.

[ 3 : 21 ] And where everyone sounds like everyone else. That was never God's intention. In the living church, It's not speaking about the dead church, In the living church, That is the church that believes the gospel, And serves the Lord Jesus Christ and his word, There will be differences of opinion.

There will be differences of opinion over disputable matters. But God actually uses the love, That we demonstrate to one another, As we cope with those differences. That is part of our witness.

That as we live as different people, With many differences, The world watches on, And they see something of our legitimate disagreements, And they see they are one people, Although they're very different, And they give glory to God.

That we disagree, In a certain way, As family. Now let's try and go to the passage in more detail, It's a long passage, But the message is quite simple.

First of all, Disputable, Does not mean, Indisputable. And we need to be careful, When we read this summary verse, In verse 1. You see what it says? In, You see what it says in verse 1?

[ 4 : 32 ] Let, As for the one who is weak in faith, Welcome him, But not to quarrel, Over opinions. Another way of translating that, Not to quarrel over disputable matters.

And I think we need to clarify, What is Paul talking about here? And it's very, Very important, In this context today, Because there are people in churches, And they are saying, Isn't it?

They would want to rewrite this verse, And they would want to rewrite it, Except him, Whose faith is weak, Without passing judgment, Without quarrelling, Over anything.

But that is not what Paul says. There are certain things, About the Bible, And about the message in the New Testament, And about Christianity, That are indisputable.

They are indisputable. There are some things, Over which every true Christian, Will agree on.

There are things which lie, At the very core, Of the Christian faith.

[ 5 : 34 ] And therefore, Things which we must, Pass judgment on, And we must pass discernment on, And we must not, Agree to differ on certain things.

So to get a flavour of this, You and I need to read this passage, In the light of the rest of the Bible.

And let me turn to, Some other parts of the Bible, Where the gospel is made clear.

So, If you've got a Bible, I should have given you Bibles today, But I didn't. If you think of, Galatians chapter 1 and verse 6. Galatians chapter 1 and verse 6. Listen to what it says.

Paul says, I am astonished that you, The Galatians, Are so quickly, Deserting him, Who called you in the grace of Christ, And are turning, To a different gospel.

Not that there is another one. But there are some people, Who trouble you, And they want to distort, The gospel of Christ. But even if we, That's the apostles, Or an angel from heaven, Should preach to you a gospel, A gospel that is contrary to the one we preached to you, Let him be accursed, Let him be damned.

[ 6 : 45 ] As we have said before, So now I say again, If anyone is preaching to you a gospel, Contrary to the one you received, Let him be accursed, Let him be damned. So you couldn't have it any clearer, Could you, At that point, It's the same writer, As the writer of the Romans, That Paul says, We must be resolutely committed, To one message.

And only one. And only ever one. Whatever anyone else says about it, There is one message. And that is clear. Now Paul is similarly, Clear on issues of morality.

So let me read to you from 1 Corinthians chapter 5. In 1 Corinthians chapter 5, Where we get, An insight into Paul's, Clear thinking, About harmony.

So 1 Corinthians chapter 5, Verse 11, But now I'm writing to you, Not to associate with anyone, Who bears the name of brother, If he's guilty of sexual immorality, Or greed, Or is an adulterer, Reviler, Drunkard, Or swindler.

Not even to eat, With such a one. Not even to eat. So how does that work, When you come to Romans chapter 14, Where Paul says, You must agree to differ.

[ 8 : 02 ] Now as Paul writes to the church in Rome, He's writing to a church, Which has got two distinct groups of believers. We've seen that, haven't we? The Jews, And the Greeks, Were both in the church. And in chapter 14, He is writing about disputable matters, Between those two groups, In Rome.

The Jewish believers, And the Gentile believers, We can say that these two groups of people, Were marked out in this way. One group, The Jewish believers, They came to the Lord Jesus, Out of a background, Of God fearing religious observance.

They had all kinds of religious traditions, And they brought those traditions, Into their Christian faith. The other group were Gentile believers, And they came from a group of godless irreligion, They had no background, Of religious tradition.

They had no previous faith. And together, These two groups of people, They formed one church, In Rome. And so the issues we see in the Bible reading, Where Paul advocates loving disagreement, Between these two groups, Are issues, That are not issues of the gospel.

And they are not issues of morality. They are not issues like, You can say, People say today, Well we have different views, Of women in church leadership.

[ 9 : 18 ] And so there's a second matter, We can disagree on that. Well not according to the Apostle Paul, In 122. Or particularly the issue of sexualities, And homosexuality. And people want to say, They are disagreeable matters.

Well not according to creation, Not according to all the word of God, Where it speaks of it. So, If you take those two areas, That Paul has spoken of in Galatians, On the message of the gospel, And on how that is lived out in our morality, Those are indisputable.

And yet, There are many, many indisputable things, In church life. And as we see in Romans 14. They are not issues of morality, They are issues of the diary, And the diet, To summarise it.

They are issues of, The calendar, And the colander. They are quite different. Special days, And special things to eat. Days when to do things, And when not to do things.

What do you eat, And what not to eat. And in those cases, Paul says, Listen, There's no problem at all, With you disagreeing, With each other, Within the church. In fact, In fact, The very way, That you disagree, On those issues, Is part of God's purpose, To hear the gospel.

[10:27] So you need to be clear, That chapter 14, In verse 1, Disputable, Does not mean, Indisputable. Secondly, As we move on, The strong bear with the weak, So that the weak becomes strong.

The strong bear with the weak, So that the weak becomes strong. Paul's hope over time, Is that as we bear with one another, The weak, The people who come with all their, Religious traditions, And their customs, The weak in time, And through the forbearance, With one another, He wants them to eventually, Become strong in their faith.

And all the time, He wants the strong, To be very patient, And loving towards the weak. Now if you look with me, At verse 5, It speaks about holy days.

Alright? I want to argue quite strongly, That he is not speaking here, About the Lord's day. And he's not speaking here, About the Sabbath day. What we call Sundays.

He's not talking about that. When you look at the New Testament, There seems to have been, Great agreement, Right from the very beginning, On the Lord's day. The Lord's day actually, Has its roots in creation.

[11:41] I think he's speaking, More of the Jewish Sabbath, And the Passover, And the feast days, The high days, And the holy days, Of the Jewish calendar. And that fits with the meat issue, As well.

And there are those, Who Paul describes, As being strong. But for the weak, The fact that the strong, Didn't keep those holy days, And high days, And festival days, That was anathema.

They were so nervous about that, They could, They could not believe, That these Gentile Christians, Didn't keep, Some of the Jewish traditions, Didn't, They ate, Certain things, That as Jews, We would never eat.

And these are the kind of things, In Romans 14 and 15, That Paul says are disputable, What to eat, And what to drink, How often, Have the Lord's supper in church, The practice of tithing, Giving 10% of your income to God, The practice of having, A daily quiet time every day, The practice of when you, Read your Bible and pray, And some people, Maybe some here, Would do that, Religiously every day.

And they would think it, Absolutely terrible, If they didn't. Others, Pray and read, In different ways. Some people I know, They read one chapter of the Bible, On a Sunday, And they try and think about it, All during the week.

[13:06] Now the key thing that Paul says, Is we should never, Pressurize someone, Into doing something, Which they believe, Would dishonor God. However we live, In these ways, We should live as to the Lord, For his sake.

And each one, Paul says, Should be fully convinced, In his own mind. They live and eat and worship, And drink to the Lord, For his honour. Remembering, As verse 11 says, That we will stand, Before God's judgment seat.

That one day, Every single one of us, Will have to give an account, Not to another, But now to him. So he says, Now we can give up, Passing judgment on each other, But in love, We can roll up our sleeves, And we can spend our life, In church, Getting down to the very hard work, Of never putting a stumbling block, In another's way.

Make up your mind, He says to do that, Resolve to do that. And so how much energy, If we're honest, Do we sometimes pour, Into establishing, In our own minds, And in the minds of others, When we have the opportunity, To do that, That our way is best.

And they who are different, Well they're, They're not quite so good. Conversations, Even though we're speaking, About brothers and sisters, In Christ, And even though we're, Speaking about, Disputable matters, How often do my conversations, Have a kind of, Caustic, Snide, Destructive aim, That puts down, And mocks others.

[14:33] However gently we do it, Paul says, Don't pour your effort, Into tearing one another down. Look at verse 19, So then let us, Pursue what makes for peace, And mutual upbuilding.

So I should be, Perfectly willing, Without a second's hesitation, I should be, Perfectly willing, If I know that my guest, On Sunday night, Who's staying with me, Has a real problem, If I have a bottle of beer, I should be more than willing, Not to have that bottle of beer.

It's going to cause them a trouble. For their sake, I'll not do it. And I'll think nothing of it. How telling it is, Look at verse 22, Here's a challenging verse, Look at verse 22, The faith that you have, Keep between yourself and God, Blessed is the one, Who has no reason, To pass judgment on himself, For what he approves, Don't bother speaking about it, You just need to talk to God about it.

Our need to love, One another, And build one another up. And if you are speaking, About these things, If you are standing on your rights, My way is best, If you are asserting your own way, Doing what you know, That you are free to do, You may actually be, Condemning yourself, To a life of, Loveless carelessness, Whereby you hurt, Your brothers and sisters, With your freedom.

Now, Paul is not too shy, To say that, He is one of the strong, That's what he calls himself, He is convinced, That it's okay, For Christian people, To eat more, To eat meat, He enjoys baking sandwiches, He likes pork sausages, And he says, That's fine.

[16:15] Verse 20, All food is clean, It's fine to eat. But in the church of believers, When they had a potluck lunch, When they had brim and share, Some of the Gentiles, Brought pork casserole, And caused havoc, Around the table, Amongst the Jews.

Paul knows, There's nothing wrong, With eating it. It's fine to eat it. But Paul knows, It's not fine to eat it, If it destroys, The freedom of another.

So bear with one another, As the weak become strong. And we should be surprised, We are surprised, Aren't we? How gently and quietly, The weak, Becomes strong, As the years go by. You'd be surprised, How gently and quietly, The weak become strong. Sometimes, Sometimes it's just, The case of maturity, Don't we? We emerge, Don't we? From the black and white, And the right and wrong world, Of youth, Into a more, Rounded understanding of things.

How many of us, Had one view, When we were 16 or 17, And we have a different view, Now that we're 40, Or 55, Or 88, But the weak become strong, In another way, That we become strong, As we get to know the Lord himself, More deeply, We learn through God's word, And we learn from God's people, We learn, The Lord is not out to trip us up, What kind of God do we believe in?

[17:38] We don't believe in a God, Who's standing there beside us, Every day with a rule book, Just waiting to endorse, Our Christian license, With points, You are in, And you are out, That's not how he works, But as we get to know the Lord, We know that he's far more interested, Far more interested, In what's going on in here, In our inward love, For him, And our practical love, For one another, He's far more interested in that, Than what we do, Or what we don't do, We mature, And we learn, Don't we, That his grace, Is bigger and deeper, Than we'd ever known, It's like a child, That slowly grows, And realises, That his relationship, With his dad and mum, Is not about rules, It's not about, Don't cross the road, It's not about, Don't go in there, It's not about, Don't touch the oven, It's about a relationship, And all of that is common sense, But what may come as a real surprise to you, Is to discover in chapter 15, Is that God actually has huge purposes,

For godly disagreements, God has huge purposes, For godly disagreements, In the church, Just much bigger, Than the harmony, Of the fellowship, Now there are four, Old testament quotations, Psalm 18, Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 117, Isaiah 11, And every single, One of those quotations, Mentions the Gentiles, Specifically coming to praise, Israel's God, It's God's global vision, And the big instruction, Of 14 verse 1, Is repeated in 15 verse 7, Having said all of that, Accept one another, Just as Christ accepted you, Why?

In order to bring praise to God, And so when people encounter, A living Christian family, When they see a real church, They'll be shocked, By two things, One, By our love of the good news, By the gospel, Which is a message, That the world hates, And in a true Christian church, They will be shocked, By our love of each other, Which the world, Does not experience, And those two things, That Christian, The non-Christian, World, Is constantly, Forming themselves, Into groups of people, Who like the same things, As each other, Who read the same books, Who have the same income, Who do the same things, But the church, Is God's, Cross, Cultural, Society, Par excellence, Where people accept, One another, Despite their differences, Do you see what Paul is saying, To all these believers in Rome, That when, People see you Jews, And you Gentiles, That you are willing, And you are patient, With one another, Even though you disagree, Over some matters, They will come

to love,

Your God too, The Gentiles, Of all people, Can you imagine it, Paul says, It's a great mark, Of spiritual maturity, That looks around, The church family, And says, Well, I'm no better than anyone else, We're just different, If you look, If you're like me, And you look into your own heart, And your own motions, You will know that is true, We are no better than one another, And when that dynamic, Is released in the church, God will be more likely, To bring people to worship, The Lord Jesus, Because we are selfless, Selfless and loving, And so, This afternoon, Are you in the strong, Or are you in the weak, Do you know, Do you have many, Many rules, Regulations, That keep your Christian life, On track, Or do you feel, You're free from all that, And that you love the Lord Jesus, It's not as simple, As those two things, Is it, Well, Whatever category, You place yourself in, That isn't what matters at all, It is irrelevant, What matters is something different, You may have endless, Shibboleths and rituals, And one day, You might be surprised, To discover in heaven, That actually, God wasn't interested, Whether you ate pork sastries, Or not, Or whether you drank wine, Or whether you kept lent, Or whether you had, Your quiet time every day, And I may discover that too, But it doesn't matter, This is what matters, Every single time, I put your needs, That's more important, Than my needs, That is something, God is extremely interested in, In that, Simple, Silent, Costly, Deathed, Self, Is the dynamic, Of the kingdom of God, And that is a brighter light, Than you might ever know, Perhaps when you get up, On a Sunday, You don't feel like coming, And you don't want to be in church, But you go for the sake,

[ 22 : 19 ] Of others, I think that's a very, Very powerful witness, To the gospel of God, Maybe you're the kind of person, Who's going around churches, Because you want to find, A group of people, That are like you, And Paul says, Don't bother with that, Paul says, If you find a church, Which preaches the gospel, And there are other human beings there, Who you can put ahead of yourself, You've found your church, It's nothing to do with me, And what I like, And so then, We must never hear those words, After church, I didn't get much, Out of that, It's irrelevant, And it's why he said, Every ridiculous attempt, By the church, To be superficially, Relevant, To the world, Is to miss the goal, By a million miles, It is nothing to do, With what people, Like for themselves, But God's family, Has everything to do, With me loving you,

And you, Putting others first, And that is massively, Relevant to the world, Because the world, Won't encounter that, Anywhere else, In chapter 5, Verse 13, That is where the Holy Spirit, Will be known, When selfless love, Which is globally relevant, Is portrayed, By the church, And actually, You don't need anything, More than the Bible, To tell you that, If there is love, Like that, Then God is there, Make up your mind, Make up it, Make every effort, And ask the Lord, To use your church family, In that way, Let's pray,