



Unity

BELIEVERS PROMOTE UNITY BY ACCEPTING
AND EDIFYING ONE ANOTHER.

ROMANS 14:5-20

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

ROMANS 14:1-15:13

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.

 **Read Romans 14:5-20. Circle preferences and underline commands. How does confusing preferences with commands create strife?**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

DISAGREEMENT (ROM. 14:5-8)

⁵ One person judges one day 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. ⁶ Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord. Whoever eats, 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; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

In verses 1-4, Paul addressed tensions in the Roman church—especially between Jewish and Gentile believers—over disputable matters such as food laws. He instructed believers not to judge one another over their differences. Instead, each person should live out their convictions unto the Lord, remembering that God—not other believers—is the true Judge.

VERSES 5-6

In addition to tensions over food laws, Paul addressed divisions in the Roman church 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. Paul urged each group to examine their convictions.

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.

VERSES 7-8

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. Believers may grow frustrated because others don't agree with them.

We diminish the tension when we remember that we are accountable to **the Lord**. We **live for** Him, and we **die for** Him. 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. We can enjoy freedom to serve God as He leads us, but we also must allow others the same right. Our rights do not extend so far as to trample the convictions of others.



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

ACCOUNTABILITY (ROM. 14:9-12)

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 your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat 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.**

VERSES 9-10

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.

VERSES 11-12

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 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?

LOVE (ROM. 14:13-18)

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. 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, 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.

VERSES 13-15

The word **therefore** connects what Paul has just said with what he is about to say. The practical application of verses 1-12 is that we must not **judge one another** nor **put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister**. A *stumbling block* is an obstacle that causes one to fall. A *pitfall* refers to a snare or trap that causes people to be offended.

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 we act in **love**. Love has regard for others, even those who may have a weaker conscience. In the interest of love, we are to patiently lay aside our rights to await growth in others.

VERSES 16-18

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**. The Spirit gives the gift of **righteousness** that results in right living. Joy and **peace** are part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). 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.



**Who has been instrumental in helping you grow spiritually?
What practical things can we do to spur on others and not be a
stumbling block?**



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.)

EDIFICATION (ROM. 14:19-20)

¹⁹ **So then, let us pursue what promotes peace 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.**

VERSES 19-20

Paul urged believers to ***pursue what promotes peace and builds up one another.*** This is what should matter most as we serve the Lord together in the church. Peace with God through Christ (Rom 5:1) extends to our relationships with other believers. Earlier in this letter, Paul urged the Romans, “If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18). Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). 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. The opposite of building up is to ***tear down.*** 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.

Once again, Paul affirmed that *everything is clean*. Mature believers understand this. However, followers of Christ who have not grown toward maturity may disagree with it. 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.

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

 **Where in my relationships do I need to intentionally “pursue what promotes peace”?**

 **BIBLE SKILL:** *Use another Bible passage to understand the focal passage.*

Read Acts 10:9-16. Summarize the vision Peter had about clean and unclean foods. How did God use the 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?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers should allow other believers to express their love for God as God directs them.
- + Every person will be held accountable for their actions and choices.
- + As members of the body of Christ, we're to spur on each other to spiritual growth.
- + Believers are to build up one another, pursuing peace in our relationships with other believers.

 **Discuss with your Bible study group current issues that resemble the dietary laws and special days in Paul's day. To what extent do believers share different convictions about the issues with one another? 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?**

 **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?**



Memorize Romans 14:19.

Prayer Needs
