

“DON’T QUARREL OVER OPINIONS.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 14:1-4

Introduction.

Paul has been exhorting us since the beginning of chapter 12 to not be conformed to this world, but to be transformed and changed by the renewing of our minds. He is calling Christians to look and act and speak in ways different from the world.

Jesus says the way the world will know we are Christians is by our love.

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Paul emphasized this by saying

Romans 12:9-10 Let love be genuine. ... 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

We are called as Christians to show the world what genuine love looks like.

This is the continuing theme of chapter 14. How we are different from the world will be most evident when they see us loving through our differences and disagreements, how we treat one another when we have differences of opinions.

The first thing to notice here is the reality of differences in the body of Christ. The essence of the Christian church is diversity, the church is made up of all kinds of people. Young and old, male and female, rich and

poor, slave and free, different races and ethnic groups, differences in backgrounds and preferences.

How is God glorified in the church?

When diverse, divergent, incompatible people welcome one another in Jesus Christ and love each other, this is a church shaped by grace. This is a church pleasing to God. This is sincere brotherly love, this is living in harmony, this is paying the debt of love, this is a church that has put on Christ.

Our diversity is essential to show the breadth and depth of God's saving grace, and the power of His unconditional love. Unity in the midst of great diversity is a sign of Christian love. Unity doesn't mean uniformity. We can and should be diverse and unified in our diversity.

What are we not talking about?

We are not talking about diversity on the fundamental truths in Scripture. There are some things that we can't agree to disagree about.

The Bible is the inerrant Word of the living God. God is both one and three. Jesus is both fully God and fully human. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Jesus is the only way of salvation.

We are not talking about immorality and sin. The Ten Commandments are not in dispute. It is wrong to dishonor those in authority, to lie, steal, commit adultery, to love things more than God.

Chapter 14 is not about those things. Every issue on which the Bible does speak, it speaks infallibly. But the Bible does not speak on every issue. Chapter 14 is about secondary matters, matters that are neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture. These issues are not to become issues that divide the body of Jesus Christ.

The question is not what positions or opinions we should hold on various issues, but how do we exercise our freedom to hold differences of opinion.

Paul gives four practical, pastoral steps for loving each other through our differences.

First, 14:1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.

We are to welcome one another in Christ. If God has welcomed our brother or sister into the body of Christ, then we also must welcome them and love them.

We are not to exclude those with whom we disagree. Love welcomes a brother and purposefully and intentionally does not get into an argument with him.

The word ***welcome/accept*** here means more than just put up with. It means welcome warmly as into the family. Show them sincere affection, the same affection you show to a brother who shares your convictions. Accept them in a manner that they don't feel inferior or unwanted.

Why welcome him?

Accept him because God has accepted him.

If God has accepted him, what are we going to do? We are not allowed to have higher standards than God. If God welcomes them, we must.

The fact that God has accepted them tells us we are not dealing with salvation issues, but secondary issues. God has accepted them regardless of their opinions or views or preferences.

God receives people into fellowship people who are on both sides of issues. He tests our love.

Accept him because he is a brother in the faith. He is not of no faith, just weak faith. He is your brother. Put away your pride. What he believes is not sin, he is seeking to follow his conscience and that honors God.

Accept the weak even when they are wrong. Paul does not want the weak brother to violate his conscience. His conscience is bound, so leave him alone, let him have his conscience.

Accept him because we both will stand at God's judgment throne. We will be held accountable for our judgments on other people.

So the first practical, pastoral steps for loving each other through our differences is to welcome.

Second, we are not to despise the more cautious believer or person of so called weaker faith.

Love means not looking down on someone who is tangled up in various unnecessary rules or complications or opinions.

The minute we look down our noses at our weaker brother who doesn't understand the free grace we have in Christ or are taking a long time to come around to our freedom in the Gospel, we are showing ourselves to be weak in our love. Don't look down or despise one another.

Third, we are not to judge another for exercising their liberty or freedom in Christ.

Love means not judging someone according to our own made-up standards that we have substituted for God's actual standards.

The strong tend to despise or look with contempt, the weak tend to condemn, look with judgment. Both despising and judging are forms of acting superior over others.

These principles of love cut both directions, from the strong to the weak and from the weak to the strong.

“Meat eaters, don’t despise vegetarians. Vegetarians, don’t pass judgment on meat eaters.”

Fourth, each believer stands or falls before his own Master. This is not referring to slaves and owners. This is about Jesus, Jesus is the master and He alone owns judgment.

In other words, we don’t have authority over others in disputable matters. They don’t answer to us. Your brother is not accountable to you but to someone else who loves him more than you do. The conscience of a Christian is bound to none but Christ. When it comes to secondary matters of conscience, what another brother or sister chooses to do is not your business. If they are wrong God will correct them.

This doesn’t mean we stop speaking our convictions. Paul keeps expressing his in this passage.

Unless you can give a chapter and verse, don’t give your perspective equal authority with God’s Word. Spiritual maturity is not just having strong convictions, it is learning to show restraint in the weight you give those convictions. And after saying your convictions, you still embraces those who disagree as brothers and sisters and you don’t look down on them.

But isn’t calling the vegetarian weak going against what Paul is saying?

Notice, Paul is not an egalitarian, he doesn’t say every opinion or view is as good as any another. In the example he uses he says the vegetarian is a weaker brother, he is not yet convinced that in Christ all foods are clean.

The weak brother or sister is the one who has not sufficiently understood the truth that “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:4-5).

This person could be a Jew or a Gentile who is struggling with conscience issues from their past life or culture or background about meat offered to idol.

Paul thinks the weak are wrong. And that's what makes this passage so helpful. Paul shows us what to do with people in the church we are convinced are wrong.

Accept them, don't act superior. The strong seek to love, seek to understand, seek to accept.

The minute the stronger brother hits the weaker brother over the head with a flank steak, he shows he is not the stronger brother at all. As one pastor put it. He is right about the meat, except for the meat in his head.

Here is the bottom line. God doesn't care about what we put in our mouths. It's all God's; eat what you wish. Just don't try to get God on your side and make Him care about what you care about against another.

Now don't go in the other ditch on this. God does care about *how much* you put in your mouth. He has something to say about gluttony and drunkenness, about unhealthy excesses, lack of self-control and self-discipline.

All things can be lawful, and still unprofitable, some things might be bad for us. I know a couple of vegetarians for whom it is a health necessity. My doctor has something to say about the health consequences of my being a connoisseur of chocolate chip cookies. But that is not the issue Paul is addressing.

We should not try to bind the consciences of others in matters that are freedoms. You shouldn't try to convince a teetotaler to drink alcohol against their conscience. Nor should a teetotaler condemn one who consumes alcohol in moderation.

Paul is saying love that insists on its own way or agenda or hobby horse or personal preference or particular crusade of the moment isn't love.

Think of all the things Christians have disagreed and divided over. Movies, card playing, dancing, reading Harry Potter, doing yoga. Remember Covid, masks, shots, government mandates.

Christianity and no make-up. Christianity and a certain diet. Christianity and organic. Christianity and home birthing or homeschooling or Christian school. Christianity and a certain worship style or music. Christianity and a certain dress code. Modesty, yes, but pants verses dresses, slacks vs. jeans, no.

Christianity and recycling, Christianity and no red meat, Christianity and guns, Christianity and buy American. Christianity and KJV only. Christianity and a certain political party or government policy. Christianity and any other human, cultural, political agenda.

Love guards us from what C.S. Lewis called “Christianity and ...” The danger of the *and* is the danger of adding something else to Christianity, of adding something else to Christ.

Anything you add dilutes and distracts from Christ, as if you say Christ is not enough. Christianity is Christ, putting on Christ.

We can hold those views, and when we do we should hold them with faith and love and a clear conscience, being fulling convinced in our own minds. But never in a way that despises or judges or disfellowships.

Love is the governing principle in all our discussions, disputes, debates, arguments, differences, disagreement. Love prevents all of these things from turning into wars, fights, division, strife, hatred, anger, bitterness. Love covers all, love trumps them all. Love covers over a multitude of sins.

Even when the consequences of other’s choices might be significant, love must prevail. Sure speak up as much as you are able, but draw the line at despising, or judging, or disfellowshipping a brother or a sister. Agree to disagree in genuine, sincere love. The question is not am I right, but am I accepting and loving.

Implications and application.

Here is the bottom line, don’t quarrel or fight over secondary issues, over opinions, over disputable matters. The Kingdom of God is more

important than differences over countless arguments over food or drink or personal or political preferences.

God wants us to glorify Him and His Son, through a united church of men and women who are more interested in pleasing others than in pleasing ourselves. A church united around genuine and sincere love for each other.

We are a people who when we quarrel need to make sure it is a lover's quarrel. We extend grace to others as God in Christ has extended grace to us.

Everything we do ought to be done to the glory of God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Feel free to exercise freedom in matters not necessary to salvation, but as we exercise that freedom, we should be more mindful of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Brothers and sisters of First Church, welcome and accept one another in love. Strive for unity and harmony and fellowship, based on the glorious truth that God has accepted us with all our differences and wrong-headed opinions and weak faith. Rejoice that God in His sovereign preserving grace will bring us to the day of judgment confident not in anything we say or do, but confident in the righteous good works of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, love."