

Receiving Believers with Different Convictions

Romans 14:1-12

How do you think I would look with pierced ears? How many of you in this room, and I know most of us are Christians, how many of you in this room think it's not okay for a guy to have a pierced ear? Let me see your hand. Yeah, okay, good for you. How many of you in this room say it's no big deal if a guy wants to pierce his ears, let me see your hand. You know what? Both groups that raised their hands are Christians.

Well, how about this. How many of you think it's wrong for a Christian to smoke a cigarette? Let me see your hand. All right, good for you. How many of you say, you know, it's no big deal if a Christian smokes a cigarette, let me see your hand.

Here's a cap. How many of you think it's wrong for a man to wear a cap inside of a church? Let me see your hand. There are a lot of people that believe it's wrong. How many of you say, well, it's no big deal if a guy wears a cap inside a church?

Now some of you are thinking, it's not important what we think about these things, it's important what the Bible says about them. All right, what does the Bible say? Did you know that the word "earring" does not even appear in the New Testament? Look up "cigarettes." Did you know you can't find the word cigarette in the Bible? It's not there. What about wearing a hat in church? You say, doesn't it say something in 1 Corinthians 11 about a man not covering his head when he prays or prophesies? It does, but it's not just talking about this physical head, it's talking about Christ as the Head of the man and submitting ourselves to His authority.

Now, I hope I have your attention today, because these kinds of issues are what Paul talks about in Romans 14 and 15. He is writing about those issues about which the Bible does not directly address and how we ought to deal with them.

Let's begin by reading Romans 14:1-12. And I want you to notice the first word of verse 1, "receive." That is how Paul starts this extended discussion and that is also how he ends it in Romans 15:7. "Receive" is the most important word in this passage. Underline it and highlight it. That is the command for us today from the Lord.

- 1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.**
- 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.**
- 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.**
- 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.**
- 5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.**

6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11 For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."

12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

The Issue: Personal convictions about Christian behavior.

First of all I want us to be clear about what problem Paul is addressing here in chapter 14. Verse 1 says it is about “**disputes over doubtful things.**” In my introduction this morning we considered some disputes over doubtful things.

The issue to which Paul speaks is the matter of personal convictions about Christian behavior. Individual Christians will often differ over matters of conscience and of personal liberties. Specifically, Paul mentions the matter of eating meat or only vegetables (v. 2), of observing certain holy days (v. 5), and of drinking wine (v. 21).

I want you to notice that the differences of which Paul speaks are not over absolutes or fundamental doctrines of the faith. While two Christians may disagree over whether or not a Christian should drink wine or eat only vegetables, no Christian should dispute the fact that adultery, stealing, and coveting are sin. These are biblical and moral absolutes. Just in the last chapter Paul had quoted those commandments. Some behaviors are sinful and not appropriate for Christians. In Romans 13:13 Paul also listed other deeds of darkness like “**revelry and drunkenness, ... lewdness and lust, ... in strife and envy.**” These things are not proper for Christians, They are sinful. We must agree on these type of commandments.

Also people cannot just believe anything and be a Christian. Certain beliefs are essential for the Christian faith. Paul has argued strongly for the essentials of the gospel in Romans. Here in Romans 14 Paul urges tolerance and acceptance of those who have scruples over food and drink and observing certain days, but in Galatians and Colossians, he denounces in no uncertain terms those who do such things. The difference is that in Galatians, those who urged observing certain days (Gal. 4:10) were saying that in addition to trusting in Christ as

Savior, you must keep the Law of Moses to be saved. They were perverting the gospel of salvation by God's grace through faith alone.

In Colossians, the heresy seems to have been a form of early Gnostic asceticism, where the false teachers said that by abstaining from certain foods or by keeping certain holy days, you could be more godly. They were saying you must add these things to faith in Christ to be saved and secure.

But in Romans 14, the weaker believers who did not eat meat and who observed certain days did not hold to these heretical views that undermined the gospel. And so Paul deals with them quite differently. There was no heresy here, only a difference of understanding in the matter of Christian convictions and Christian liberties. The weak brothers perhaps were immature in their understanding and needed to grow. But they were not promoting heresy that undermined the gospel. So Paul's main concern was the potential divisions among Christians because they were wrongly judging one another over secondary matters where the Bible does not give specific commandments.

Some Christians say, "Hey, this is wrong, I can't do it." But some Christians say, "There's nothing wrong with this, I can do it." Some Christians say, "I can't put an earring in my ear," and some Christian guys say, "Hey, no big deal, I can put an earring in my ear." There is disagreement, matters of personal conviction.

Paul gives a couple of examples here. Number one, he talks about what you ingest, what you consume:

a. The diet and drink issue

In the Church of Rome, there were Jews and Gentiles. There were both converts from Judaism and from Paganism. Perhaps there were some Jewish Christians in Rome that had always eaten kosher food. They had always observed the seventh day Sabbath and other Jewish holy days. They found it hard to believe, to have the faith, that all those things were now unimportant. It wounded their conscience to even consider changing their behavior in these areas.

Other Christians came out of idol worship, paganism. The meat sold in the markets of Rome often had been sacrificed on pagan altars before it was sold. Some Christians bought this meat and they ate it up without a problem. But there were some Christians said, "Oh no, a Christian cannot eat that meat, that would be like worshiping a false God." So they thought the best thing to do was just don't eat any meat.

If Paul had just said, "I'm going to address this issue. Don't eat meat, period." That would have settled it. He said, "No, there's some Christians that will and some that won't. It's a matter of personal conviction."

Kent Hughes had this to say about the situation: "*The 'easy' solution to this problem would have been to form two churches: 'The Church of the Carnivores' (perhaps not a bad name for some churches I have heard of!) and 'The First Church of the Vegetarians.'* Paul, fortunately, was committed to the nobler, though far more difficult, solution."

b. The day issue

In verse five, one man considers one day more sacred than another. Some of these Christians had come out of Judaism and they were still keeping Saturday, observing the Sabbath. Worshipping on Sunday. Other of Christians were coming and saying, “No. No day is more important than any other day.” Now, those were some issues that the Bible didn’t address directly, and Paul said, “It’s a matter of personal conviction.”

Now, admittedly these two issues are not the biggies in our Christian experience today. But we have our own issues.

c. What are some modern taboos?

Taboo or not taboo, that is the question. Is it right or is it wrong? Some Christians say it’s right to do it, some Christians say it’s wrong, and they disagree.

We have already mentioned a couple of these kind of things in the introduction, but think about your convictions in these areas:

- Gambling or playing the Lottery
- Watching PG-13 or R-rated movies
- Dancing
- Drinking a glass of wine or a beer with dinner
- Listening to secular music
- Watching sports
- Using birth control
- Sporting tattoos
- Educating your kids in public school, Christian school or home school
- Owning a luxury car or other extravagant possessions
- Working on Sunday
- Observing Halloween

And you could probably come up with a whole host of other issues, things that maybe have inferences in scripture but nevertheless they are neither commanded nor prohibited in scripture. These are the kind of “doubtful things” Paul is talking about.

Understanding the Weak and the Strong:

Three times in this passage, he speaks about a weak Christian. The weak brother here is “**weak in the faith.**” This does not mean that he does not trust in Christ as his Savior or that he is confused about the gospel. Rather, the weak one is someone who is very sensitive in these doubtful issues. The one who is weak in faith eats vegetables only (14:2), apparently for religious reasons, not for health reasons. He thinks that eating meat somehow would damage his relationship to God. He has not yet understood the full ramifications of faith in Christ that frees us from the law (Rom. 7:1-6) and that all foods are clean for the Christian (Rom. 14:14; Acts 10:15; Mark 7:19).

The strong brother (Paul puts himself in that group, 15:1) knows that eating or not eating meat has no effect on one's relationship with God, so it doesn't bother his conscience to eat a good steak or, for that matter, a slice of ham or bacon. A "strong" brother or sister is the one who can exercise his freedom in Christ with a clear conscience.

The issue is disputes over doubtful things, personal convictions about Christian behavior. The two kinds of believers are the weak and the strong. And no matter in which group you find yourself, there is one essential attitude we must have regarding one another: Acceptance.

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Again, the first word in chapter 14 is "**Receive**." Paul says draw one another to yourself (that's the idea of the middle voice). Grant them access to your heart. Take them to yourself. Treat them as the closest of friends with the most caring kindness. Believers are to receive one another in the closest of bonds. In other words, Accept one another!

It doesn't just mean tolerate one another. Paul uses this same word in verse 3 to say, "**God has received him**." In Romans 15:7 he writes, "**Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God**." How did Christ receive you? Did He wait until you agreed with God about everything? Did He expect you to first clean up your act and do everything right? No! You were accepted by believing in Jesus while you were still a sinner.

So to receive one another here means embrace and accept one another, even those who disagree with you about some of these matters of personal conviction. Some say it was Augustine who said, *"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."*

Accepting means: We don't judge others' behavior in these non-essential areas.

Look at verse 3, "**Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. 4 Who are you to judge another's servant?**"

The word, "**despise**" is really strong. It literally means, "To regard as nothing; to throw out like trash." The tense indicates that they were to stop doing something that was their practice and custom. And the word "**judge**" refers to the condemnation reserved for those who have broken God's laws. When we condemn we often make assumptions that are exaggerated, erroneous and even damaging to one's character. Both groups had become polarized because they had taken a "disputable matter" and turned it into a moral issue.

The strong are not to despise the weak and the weak are not to judge the strong.

Three Important Reasons to Accept Each Other:

Paul give three reasons we act this way. Three reasons we accept our brothers.

1. We are accepted by the Lord

That's what it says in verse 3. If you'll look at it again, the last part of it says, **"God has accepted him."** Accepted whom? Accepted the guy who eats meat and the guy who doesn't eat meat. God has accepted the Christian who smokes, and He's accepted the Christian who doesn't.

God did not accept you on the basis of your behavior in these areas. So then we should not require it as a condition of our acceptance either. Who are you to reject the one that God has accepted? Are your standards higher than God's standards? If so, it's time to reevaluate your standards according to God's word.

2. We belong to the Lord

Look at verse 4, **"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand."** We are God's servants. He is the one who makes us to stand. He alone has the power to hold us up.

Look at verses 8 and 9. **"For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living."** Four times in those two verses Paul reminds us that we belong to the Lord. We both together belong to the Lord, and He's the one that calls the shots. I have no right to tell you what you can do and can't do, outside of what the word of God says.

3. We will be judged by the Lord

Look at verse 10. It says, **"But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.'" So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.** Listen, I do not sit in judgment over you and you don't sit in judgment over me. We will all sit under the judgment of Jesus Christ at the judgment seat, the time when He passes out rewards.

So the reason we act this way and the reason we accept one another is because Jesus has accepted us. We belong to him, and we're going to be judged by him.

I hope and pray that New Covenant Baptist Church will be a church that lives by grace--the kind of church that will accept someone who drives a Rolls Royce or someone who rides the GVT everywhere they go. I hope it will be the kind of church that accepts people who don't do anything after church on Sunday, just stay at home and take a nap, and people who may go out after church and enjoy recreational activities. I hope we can be the kind of church where we accept people who wear a tuxes or overalls, where we accept people with tattoos and those who wear head coverings. Accept all kinds of people. You know why? Because there's room in the body of Christ for people who disagree on these issues that we call nonessentials.

There's one final word Paul gives on this. I want you to turn over to the right about 40 pages in your Bible to Colossians 2:16. Here's Paul's final word,

Colossians 2:16-17, no comment, just let God speak to you. **“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”**

Jesus Christ died and rose so that He might be Lord. And that is really the ultimate issue in our convictions, on one hand, and the way we treat others, on the other. Do your convictions evidence the Lordship of Christ and the grace of the gospel that saved you? Does the way you treat others give the aroma of Christ's Lordship? Or does it appear you are trying to subtly mold people in your image?

Hold your convictions because you are convinced that they are the best way for you, personally, to glorify the risen Christ. But hold them as mere convictions and not as the powerful gospel that transforms sinners into new creations through Christ. The substance is Christ. Do you know Him? Is He Lord in your life?