

Sermon Outline

WELCOME ONE ANOTHER

(ROMANS 15:7)

I. Introduction

II. Gospel Inclusivity (Rom 14)

- A. Romans 15:7 is part of a larger body of teaching that really begins in Romans 14.
- B. The underlying goal of this teaching is to call for harmony, forbearance, and unity within churches. The occasion for this teaching is the conflict between Christians with different convictions about various practices.
- C. In Romans 14, Paul teaches Christians how to treat believers who are weaker (i.e., less mature in conscience and understanding).
 - 1. The weak believers are those with less mature consciences; a less developed sense of right and wrong, due to weaker understanding of the Gospel.
 - 2. Thus, those brethren are still very cautious about certain issues where God has actually given us freedom.
 - 3. In Paul's context, the issues had to do with what one may eat or drink; and what days were considered holy.
- D. Romans 14 begins with a call for the more mature believer to treat the weaker Christians with respect.
 - Rom 14:1: "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions."
- E. Then he says in 14:2-3: "One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him."
 - 1. Paul is trying to bring the two groups of Christians together—the more liberated types and the more conservative types.
 - 2. The believer who has no problem eating meat and other things does so because he knows that God has given him freedom in Christ to eat different things.
 - 3. In light of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done, food is no longer an issue.
 - 4. But that said, this stronger believer must not use his or her maturity to disdain the weaker believer.
 - 5. "Let not the one who eats"—that is, the stronger believer, the more theologically-developed believer—"despise the one who abstains."
 - 6. By that same token, the weaker, more "cautious" believer who eats only vegetables, must also not pass judgment on the one who eats meat.

- F. What is the reason that Paul gives for not passing judgment?—“for God has welcomed him.”
- G. The principle: The house of God must not be a place of contentiousness and judgmentalism, but mutual acceptance, respect, and affection.
 1. We must live according to what we are convinced God’s Word has said.
 2. At the same time, we must also recognize that there are others who may disagree with us precisely on how God’s Word is to be applied and so they will practice differently.
 3. Either way, we are obligated to respect one another. We are called to be patient and accepting of another. We are commanded to “welcome” one another.
- H. But to further silence our natural craving to criticize others, we should heed what else Paul writes:
 - Rom 14:4: “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”

III. The Obligation (Rom 15)

- A. We go on to chapter 15, which begins this way: “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” (15:1)
- B. Romans 15:2: “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”
 1. If we consider ourselves mature, theologically-strong Christians, we are obliged to bear with our weaker brethren.
 2. In fact, we demonstrate our maturity not by criticizing or scorning our weaker neighbors, but by bearing with them.
 3. This is one of those instances where Scripture goes against the logic of the world, which teaches us to lord it over or separate ourselves from the weak.
- C. Paul roots this behavior in the example set by Christ himself.
 - Rom 15:3: “For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.””
- D. Only God can create this virtue in us.
 - Rom 15:3: “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,”
- E. The goal of that unity is “that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v 6).

IV. Welcome One Another

- A. If God desires for the strong to be patient with the weak, and for the weak not to judge the strong; and if God wants churches to be places of forbearance and

patience, what then is the role of the individual believer in all of this? How are Christians to treat one another?

- B. Verse 7 tells us.
- Rom 15:7: “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”
- C. This is now the third time that Paul has issued this instruction in the Scripture portion we have been considering.
- Rom 14:1: “As for the one who is weak in faith, *welcome* him, but not to quarrel over opinions.”
 - Rom 14:3: “Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has *welcomed* him.”
- God really wants us to be *welcoming* persons and a *welcoming* community.
- D. To “welcome” (*proslambanō*) is to...
- receive,
 - take to one’s self,
 - take as one’s companion,
 - receive into one’s home,
 - grant access into one’s heart.
- E. Christ wants his church to be a reflection of the new creation. In God’s new world, there will be no more strangers and outsiders. We are one in Christ.
- F. Think about the impact this statement would have had in the churches to which Paul wrote.
1. In Paul’s churches, there were people who were at logger-heads with one another because of issues pertaining to food and holy days.
 2. But Christ says, through Paul, Respect one another. Welcome one another.
 3. Implication: Learn to disagree in an agreeable, godly way. Live and let live.
- G. In our present settings, churches continue to argue and to divide over all kinds of issues relating to practice:
- Must we sing only Psalms or can we sing other hymns as well?
 - Is it appropriate to use drums and electric guitars in worship?
 - What kinds of things must we refrain from on the Lord’s Day?
 - Is it appropriate for us to celebrate Christmas given that it is not commanded in the Bible?
 - What is the best Bible translation?
 - Must a mother with small children only be a homemaker or can she also work outside of the home?
- H. Some practical implications:
1. Regardless of our convictions on these matters, be careful not to judge brothers and sisters who have chosen to do things differently (also on the basis of Scripture).
 2. Unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, we have to assume that our fellow believers in other churches or even in our midst are doing what they

do, because they believe Scripture requires them to do so, or else the Scripture gives them the freedom to do so.

3. Not everyone who disagrees is sliding into godlessness and a life of sin.
4. Again: “Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him” (14:3).

V. As Christ Has Welcomed You

- A. Differences are hard. It is too easy to judge someone who does things differently, who may read the Bible differently on some points. This is all the more so if we come from church traditions where such behavior is actually encouraged.
- B. Is there anything that is strong enough to hold people of vastly different cultures, personality-types, life experiences, even doctrinal convictions together?
 1. Yes, Jesus is enough. “Therefore welcome one another *as Christ has welcomed you*, for the glory of God.”
 2. Christ has taken us into his family. Christ has embraced us and drawn us into the very orbit of his life. Christ did this when we put our faith in him.
- C. So we must welcome and receive one another. This is a good work that God calls us to do, because Christ has already received us.
 1. We repent of our ingrained desire to lord it over others, score points over others, or “one-up” over others.
 2. To help decide what behaviors or attitudes to give up, ask: Is this attitude or behavior that I am having compatible with life in a community that is supposed to reflect the new humanity of Jesus Christ? Given how large God’s heart is toward me, how can I exclude my fellow believers?

VI. Again, “Christ Has Welcomed You”

Yet the good news is that in spite of how messed up the church is today, how poorly we welcome one another, how much we like thumbing others down (using God’s Word as a weapon), God looks on the entire mess and sees one Man, his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. When he sees his Jesus, he sees perfect obedience. He sees perfect love. The Gospel says, “Christ has welcomed you.” That is the good news on which we build our news lives. By *dying* for our sins, Jesus paid for the apathy, pride, and hatefulness of our hearts. Jesus the Son of God took the curse that we deserved whenever we turn God’s Word into a weapon to crush other believers and promote ourselves. By *rising* from the dead, Jesus rose to new life and brought us all with him into the very center of God’s love, the very heart of God’s loving embrace. And because Jesus cannot be removed from God’s house, we who are in him cannot be removed either. *The welcome is forever.* If we are in Christ, we can never be un-welcomed.

That's who we are. That's where we are. So why not welcome those who are in him too?

Questions for Reflection

1. Was there anything in particular about today's sermon that blessed and encouraged you?
2. Was there anything with which you disagree or found difficult to accept?
3. Who are the weaker and stronger Christians in Rom 14?
4. What does Rom 14:1 call the more mature believer to do for the weaker one?
5. What does Rom 14:3 call the weaker believer to do for the stronger one—and why?
6. What principle does Rom 14:2-3 teach us?
7. "The house of God must not be a place of contentiousness and judgmentalism." Discuss. Ponder.
8. Why is it wrong to pass judgment on our fellow servant? (v 4)
9. According to 15:1-2, what obligation is laid on the strong? What does this tell us about how God sees the function of strength, power, and maturity?
10. How does Paul motivate us to do this in Rom 15:3?
11. What is the goal of our unity (15:6)?
12. Why is Christ enough to be our sole principle of deep, Christian friendship, welcome, and unity?
13. What sins or sinful patterns and values must we repent of to be more faithful welcomers?
14. How does God see us in Christ? How does this empower us to be welcomers?