

LET'S STRIVE FOR THE
THINGS THAT BRING

PEACE

AND THE THINGS THAT

BUILD EACH
OTHER UP

ROMANS 14:19

WEEK 6

CREATIVE CONFLICT



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MONDAY – “We belong to God.” Why judge each other?



Romans 14: 1-12

Romans 14: 4 *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.*

Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome differed strongly about, e.g., eating “unclean” meat or keeping holy days. Paul told them, “It is nothing less than usurping Christ’s sovereign authority over a fellow-Christian to criticize him over a difference of opinion: for the less scrupulous to look down on the more scrupulous, or for the more scrupulous to judge the less scrupulous. Christian fellowship does not imply a right to run other people’s lives for them: only Christ can—and will—discharge such a right.” *

A bit later, Paul made it plain that he did not agree with the people he called “weak in faith” (cf. Romans 14:14. Yet in verse 3 he said neither group (including him) could look down on the others, “because God has accepted them.”

Reflection:

How easy or hard is it for you to agree with Paul that God has accepted people who love Jesus yet disagree with you on particular points of faith?

John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, said in a famous sermon, “Though a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without doubt, we may.”

Reflection:

Are there people with whom you do not think alike, yet you can choose to love alike?



Prayer: Lord Jesus, I fully commit myself to belong to You. Precisely because I belong to You, save me from despising a brother or sister who also belongs to You despite seeing some things differently from me. AMEN

* Leslie C. Allen, “Romans” in F. F. Bruce, gen. ed., *New International Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979, p. 1342.

** To read Wesley’s entire sermon, “A Catholic Spirit” edited into modern English, [click here](#).

TUESDAY – “Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”



Romans 14: 13-23

Romans 14: 19 *So let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other. Help others with encouraging words; don't drag them down by finding fault.*

If you examine what various congregations list in their “What We Believe” statements, you’ll generally find lists of 8 to 15 items. Yet in Romans, sent to a group of smaller “home groups” in Rome, Paul named the central truth of life in God’s kingdom in a phrase: “God’s kingdom is...about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” We can differ on the details if we get the centre right.

As God’s people focus their spiritual walk on “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit,” Paul said they can stop sniping at one another. In verse 20, he asked the “progressives” (like him) “to recognize that there are [some] occasions when they need to hold back from this freedom for the sake of those whose Christian faith would be irreparably damaged by such behaviour.” *

Reflection:

How can you use your God-given freedom in ways that bless others, not just to enhance your own life?

We rarely argue hotly about holy days or food’s “holiness,” so it may feel easy to live out Romans 14:17. But we DO differ, often strongly, about abortion, immigration, how God views varied sexual orientations, race, what “the Bible is inspired” means, even church music! Paul said, “Stop judging each other.”

Reflection:

Was that a “low” rule for inclusion, one even a woman taken in adultery or a thief on a cross could pass? Which challenges you more: the “height” or the “lowness” of Paul’s standard?



Prayer: Lord God, only You are wise enough to judge each person’s thoughts and heart intentions. Help me release the urge to judge others, and instead to seek to show all people Your peace and love.
AMEN

* Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone, Romans Part Two: Chapters 9-16 (The New Testament for Everyone)* (p. 107). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

WEDNESDAY – God’s plan to help us “overflow with hope”



Romans 15: 5 *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had...*

Romans 15: 13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Paul kept stressing that we don’t accept others because we are “nice”—we accept others because God in Christ has accepted us (verse 7). Both as a rabbi and an apostle, Paul firmly believed that “whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction” (verse 4). So, he chose verses from the Hebrew Scriptures that said God wanted to reach all people, including Gentiles. He’d thought and prayed hard about the Bible, and traced the long arc of God’s purpose, not just isolated verses.

Adam Hamilton said wise Bible reading requires something like “a kitchen strainer: holding the

important things while the less desirable are rinsed off. One of the best ‘strainers’ is: What is the heart, character, and will of God that Jesus reveals? **Jesus...** serves as the final Word by which other words of scripture are to be judged.” *

Paul named specific traits the Bible can nurture in us: “So that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures.”

Reflection:

In what ways does the Bible encourage you to strengthen your hope and build your endurance?



Prayer: Lord Jesus, lead my heart beyond theories, abstractions and rigid systems. Meet me as I come to the Bible and speak Your life-giving word into my heart. AMEN

* Hamilton, Adam. *Making Sense of the Bible: Rediscovering the Power of Scripture Today* (pp. 176- 177). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition. ** John Stott, *The Message of Romans*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, p. 371.



MEMORY VERSE: Romans 14: 19 *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*

THURSDAY – Paul’s dream: start a new “location” in Spain



Romans 15: 14-33

Romans 15: 14 *I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.*

Verse 17: *Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.*

We see Paul’s church-planter’s mind at work here. After he’d carried a special offering to Christians in Jerusalem, he aimed to stop in Rome on his way to preach in Spain! (That didn’t work out, Acts said.) Imagine what Paul could have done with the Internet! It was tough to be a Christian, much less a travelling Christian evangelist, in the Roman Empire. So, Paul asked the Roman Christians to support him in his travels with their prayers.

Paul referred to Macedonia and Achaia, two large provinces in which he’d planted churches. Look them up on a map in the back of your Bible (or online) to see what a wide span of still-young churches were sending help to Jerusalem.

Reflection:

What important values get lost when congregations see themselves as opponents or rivals, rather than part of the one global fellowship of believers?

Paul had a lot of demanding tasks on his plate when he wrote Romans. He was handling a large offering to take to Jerusalem, dealing inwardly with threats he would face there (verse 31; cf. Acts 21:10-13) and planning for future travel in Spain. Yet he ended this section, typically, by speaking about God’s gifts of joy and peace.

Reflection:

What helps you to inwardly access God’s gifts of profound joy (not always “happiness”) and peace even at times of stress or intense activity?



Prayer: God, I sometimes make my culture’s mistake of thinking You only care about my “religious” life. Let Paul’s example show me that You’re my guide and resource even in “everyday” activities.
AMEN

FRIDAY – Bring glory to God! - avoid divisions



Romans 16: 17-27

Romans 16: 25 – 27 *Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith - to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen*

Paul warned about “people who create divisions People like that aren’t serving the Lord.” Paul used his letter’s closing to reinforce the message he’d shared throughout the letter. “Paul realizes that he can hardly bring this letter of all letters to a conclusion without Jesus being in the very middle of it.... a view of Jesus which sees him as fully and completely divine as well as fully and completely human—doesn’t have to wait for later centuries and writers. It is already fully present in Paul, not least in this, his greatest letter. *

Powerful people have misused secrecy to hide corrupt or abusive

actions, so we are suspicious of secrets. Paul’s mention of God in Jesus announcing “the secret [or *mystery*] that was kept quiet for a long time” may bother us. But the “mystery” Paul meant was the question of how God would restore this broken world to its original innocence, beauty and peace. And the secret was secret no longer—God’s plan to save the world was Jesus

Reflection:

As we finish this study of Romans, what have you learned about God’s amazing plan to restore and save you (and the whole world)?



Prayer: Saving God, I can almost picture an elated twinkle in Your eye when I grasp more fully the amazing gift You offer all of us. Move me to a life of grateful devotion in sharing Your good news with others. AMEN

* Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone, Romans Part Two: Chapters 9-16* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 141-142). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.