

## 6 | Accept



### THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In a perfect world everyone would agree with me; everyone would bring up their kids like I do; everyone would sing the songs I like; everyone would spend their money like I spend mine. What a wonderful world it would be if everyone started reading from the right script, which just so happens to be the one in my hand! But the reality is, I don't live in a perfect world ... and neither do you. We don't always see eye-to-eye. The question for each of us is: What do we do when we disagree?

We can spend an enormous amount of time persuading the other person to subscribe to our point of view, but what if that approach doesn't work? (And it often doesn't.) What happens next? Is the relationship over?

In the Book of Romans, Paul taught us to remain humble when we have differences in opinion. Clearly, some hills are worth dying on and at times we need to stand our ground, but Paul helped us to see where to draw those lines. His instructions guide us to maintain strong relationships in spite of any and every difference of opinion.

# GROUP TIME

**THE POINT:** Strong relationships are not hindered by \_\_\_\_\_ of opinion.

What's the difference between being united and being unified? If you were to take two enemies, handcuff them together, and lock them in a room, you'd see two persons *united* but not *unified*. Just because people are together doesn't mean they're unified.

**Romans 14:1-4** <sup>1</sup> Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters. <sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge another's household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand.

**Acceptance means we can accept a person whose \_\_\_\_\_ differ from ours.**

Paul addressed the importance of relationships—not simply staying in the same church but staying closely knit together. Romans 14 indicates rival groups of individuals were popping up in the church because members were joining forces according to their personal persuasions and preferences. Believers became critical of one another for holding different views.

- ▶ This division was wrong and out of place, especially given the fact that they were arguing over petty things. They weren't debating the gospel or dividing over whether Jesus had truly died for their sins. They were arguing over foods and festivals. *What foods should we eat—and not eat? What days should we celebrate on our calendar?*
- ▶ Paul later referred to these two groups as the weaker and the stronger (15:1). What made one group stronger was their spiritual maturity; they rightly understood Christian liberty. Those in the “strong” group were far from perfect, but they understood that whether a person ate meat or only vegetables, and what day another person considered holy didn't point to disobedience or a lack of love and commitment to Christ.
- ▶ The “weaker” party included Christians who had grown up with certain rules and practices—rules and practices that were deeply ingrained in them. These were committed followers of Christ, but their conscience kept them from embracing new freedoms.

**Romans 14:13-15** <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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.

**Acceptance means we \_\_\_\_\_ to cause the other person to stumble.**

The “stronger” group had a more mature understanding of Christian freedom, but Paul didn’t let this group off the hook completely. He challenged these believers not to be insensitive by flaunting their freedoms. They should avoid offending others: “Decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister” (v. 13).

## PURSUE PEACE

Consider the following issues that can cause division within the Christian community. Write down your conviction or preference beside each one.

*Church attire* \_\_\_\_\_ *Worship music style* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Emphasis on local vs. international missions* \_\_\_\_\_ *Other* \_\_\_\_\_

What are some practical ways you can respond to those with different views?

**Romans 14:16-19** <sup>16</sup> Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, <sup>17</sup> for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

<sup>18</sup> Whoever serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and receives human approval.

<sup>19</sup> So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.

**Acceptance means we \_\_\_\_\_ up the other person.**

The most important things in life aren’t meats and vegetables! So what is to be the main focus of believers? The kingdom of God. In verse 17, Paul wrote, “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Verse 19 is particularly helpful in completing this thought: “So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.” We’re called to wear the badge of a servant. Again, we’re talking about preferences and differences of opinion. Certainly, times may arise when we must make a clear moral and biblical stand, and that stand could cause division. Even then, however, we must stand for truth in a loving way, with unity in mind (Ephesians 4:15).

## LIVE IT OUT

What will you do to build relationships in spite of any differences of opinion?

- ▶ **Extend grace.** If others have offended you because their actions go against your convictions, forgive. Don't hold these actions over their heads.
- ▶ **Let go.** You may feel perfectly free in Christ to participate in some activities, but others don't. Let go of your freedom to engage in the activity in order to respect and serve the other person.
- ▶ **Agree to disagree.** Meet with someone with whom you have a difference of opinion. It might help if you each communicated why you hold to a certain conviction; in the end, however, you may still choose to agree to disagree. Maintain love and respect for the other person in spite of the difference.

## TALK IT OUT

**Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Romans 14:1-4,13-19, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.**

Some people feel like they can have nothing to do with a person who believes differently. At the other end are those who say we must not only accept any differences, but we must endorse those differences, as if it's OK to have that opposing view. We need to recapture what it means to accept another person. The Book of Romans gives us practical direction on how we do this, especially within the body of Christ.

*What are some modern issues that parallel the ones mentioned in Romans 14:1-4?*

*How can we apply Paul's teachings in this passage to our interactions on social media?*

*What is a Christ-follower's responsibility for building peace among other believers?*



## DAY 1: We can accept others for the sake of unity.

### Read Romans 14:1-4.

While one group may have been more mature in their thinking, both groups were guilty of a critical spirit. Rather than running each other down and resenting the positions held by the other group, Paul challenged them to “accept” one another. Acceptance carries the idea of welcoming others and being generous toward them. The world defines acceptance as a full affirmation, even endorsement, of a person’s beliefs and practices. The Bible doesn’t use the word *accept* to mean to condone sin. Instead, it’s a desire to stay close, even when both parties see things differently.

It’s important to keep in mind that Paul was talking about disputable matters—those things Scripture is silent about. In other words, he’s not talking about black-and-white sin. On the other hand, when a believer sees a brother in Christ walking down the street in a drunken state, he should challenge his choices (Ephesians 5:18). Likewise, if a Christian discovers her sister in Christ is involved in sexual immorality, she has an obligation to confront her (1 Corinthians 6:18; Galatians 6:1). In Romans 14, Paul was addressing “gray areas” in the Christian life. Still, in verse 4, he made it plain that each of us will have to answer to God for the way we have lived this life. God isn’t going to ask me what I thought about another person’s actions. God is the Lord and Judge over the other person. I’m not.

*Assess your attitude. When are you most likely to judge others? What actions or ideas do you criticize? Commit to respect differences in pursuit of unity.*

*“Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don’t argue about disputed matters.”*

ROMANS 14:1

## **DAY 2: Be ready to sacrifice for the benefit of others.**

### **Read Romans 14:13.**

Before my kids were old enough to pick up after themselves, they would leave their blocks, cars, and assorted jagged toys scattered across the floor. In light of this, I soon discovered the wisdom of clearing a path to the kitchen each night. It only took one disastrous trip to the fridge in the dark for me to realize the pain of a stumbling block. *CRASH! BOOM! POW!* This wasn't the racket from a Batman movie, but from Ben Mandrell falling on his face after tripping over one of those little foot daggers! Of course, I couldn't be angry at my baby boys for causing me to eat carpet. They didn't know any better. Unfortunately, many Christians are fully aware they're putting down stumbling blocks. They know some Christians see a particular activity as offensive, but they don't care. They're going to do it anyway.

Out of respect for others, mature Christians will restrict their freedom, removing anything from their lives that would cause others to feel wounded in their conscience. Our personal relationships should trump our personal freedoms. The strong should move toward the weak.

*Which issues on social media are you likely to comment on? Let go of any trivial issues where your negative comments might be a stumbling block to someone else.*



## DAY 3: Choose actions and words that build unity.

### Read Romans 14:14-15.

Simon was a vibrant, young worship leader. While in college, he was invited to bring his band and lead the music at a more traditional church. The pastor was very kind and appreciative, but he did request that Simon wear a coat and tie, the normal attire for their church leaders. Feeling insulted, Simon wondered: *How could this church insist on a dress code that isn't found in Scripture? Why can't they accept me for who I am?* Simon rejected the pastor's request and arrived on Sunday in his faded jeans and favorite T-shirt.

It's easy to fall into Simon's selfish, self-centered way of thinking. It's likely that you—just like me—at some point have tried to justify your behavior by saying, “Those people need to get over it.” This mentality doesn't build healthy relationships. Furthermore, wounding your brother or sister in Christ for no good reason is wrong. We need to have the opposite attitude. Whenever we consider the conscience of others as we make adjustments to our lives, we're demonstrating maturity more than compromise.

*Invest in a friendship with someone you might not normally befriend due to perceived differences. Pay special attention to the things you have in common.*

## DAY 4: Keep your focus on kingdom priorities.

### Read Romans 14:16-17.

Paul exhorted the early Christians to put trivial differences aside for the glory of God. Instead of focusing on these things, they were to prioritize the kingdom of God. Paul's words here are important for us too. So, how do we put this into practice? What does it mean for us to place our focus on God's kingdom?

- ▶ We live to make the kingdom of God and His glory known throughout the earth.
- ▶ We live to build His kingdom and promote His purpose.
- ▶ We live to see our Savior return in power and glory, with our lives poised for service.

When someone disagrees with us or offends us, our natural reaction is to run away from the person, build a wall of defense, or just keep our distance. In some situations these boundaries are needed, but the healthiest Christian response is to maintain the relationship. We're called to stick with it and serve the people God has placed around us. As we wash the feet of our friends as well as our foes, we keep the focus on God's kingdom and not on ourselves.

*What things are most important in the kingdom of God? Record a few of these below. Keep these priorities in mind as you encounter different ideas and opinions.*

## DAY 5: Acceptance paves the way for healing in fractured relationships.

### Read Romans 14:18-19.

We may never see a greater test of the depth of our love than when disagreement hits our family. Families sometimes have fierce disagreements. As a result, fathers and sons, sisters and brothers may suffer from years of estrangement that stem back to a single heated discussion. Sadly, decades can pass, and the substance of the argument will be completely forgotten, but the wall of separation stands high and unyielding. Civil wars are usually the worst kinds of clashes. A family has no winners when Thanksgiving dinners and Christmas gatherings are removed from its scrapbook of memories.

Scripture compels us to do our part to preserve relationships. The kingdom of God is about “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (v. 17). May we promote these things in the lives of our families and our churches. Never give up on the hope of healing.

*In what relationship or situation is God calling you to demonstrate acceptance for the sake of His kingdom? Ask Him to provide what you need to follow Him in obedience.*

*“Scripture compels us to do our part  
to preserve relationships.”*

BEN MANDRELL