

## Session 6

May 31, 2020

### ACCEPT

#### Romans 14:1-4, 13-19

Sibling rivalry and family squabbles are part of growing up. As the “baby” of the family and with two older brothers, I was at the bottom of the pecking order and consigned to third-phase hand-me-downs, all because I was the youngest. For my brothers to yield to my whims was most unnatural and almost unheard of.

But the family of God operates by love, not family status. For this reason, the apostle Paul repeatedly reminded the church to exchange our natural animosity toward the immature with supernatural acceptance. In our passage this week, three actions are called for.

**Accept others (vv. 1-4).** After giving so much doctrinal instruction, the apostle Paul reminds the believers in Rome not to allow Christian knowledge to be a source of pride and contention. After all, the basis of Christian fellowship is not *how much you know*, but rather *how well you love* (see Rom. 13:8-10). For this reason, he admonishes Christ-followers to “receive anyone who is weak in the faith.” Here, to receive is to *accept*, or even *invite*. Weakness is characterized by a shallow, not-yet-fully-developed belief system. In our day, we would describe someone “weak in the faith” as *spiritually immature*. But the important thing is to remember they are still “in the faith,” whether weak or not! For this reason, he reminds mature believers not to bring weaker believers into the fellowship for the purpose of debating *who’s right* and *who’s wrong* (v. 1). Verses 2 and 3 illustrate the type of “doubtful issue” Paul is talking about. Believing Gentiles, for instance, were not encumbered with the dietary restrictions inherent in the Jewish tradition. While good arguments might be made from both sides, the point is moot, because God said it is! The phrase “Who are you” (v. 4) is pretty harsh (in our vernacular, we might say, “How dare you!”). No one has the right to judge another’s servant for he has no power over him. In the same way, no man has the right to judge Christ’s servant either. That’s the Lord’s business.

**Protect others (vv. 13-15).** In Paul’s mind, receiving a weaker brother into the fellowship is not enough. Weaker brethren require protection. It may seem ironic that the person who is “right” must always do the yielding, but it makes good sense that the more mature believer be the most flexible and always take the high road in dealing with less mature believers. Verse 14 introduces the effect of the conscience. While Paul felt no obligation to the Old Testament law, he knew that others did. While God might not hold one accountable to the law, God does hold one accountable to his own conscience. For this reason, Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 8:13, “Therefore, if food makes my brother to stumble, I will eat no meat while the world stands, lest I make my brother to stumble.” In other words, my exercise of Christian liberty is not worth the damage it will cause if it offends another believer (v. 15). In the end, love trumps liberty, even if I am “right” and you are “wrong.”

**Work with others (vv. 16-19).** Besides the more personal warnings to neither criticize nor offend a weaker believer, the apostle adds a more general warning: do not—by nit-picking with one another—give occasion for others to speak evil of the blessing of Christian liberty (v. 16). Few things give more spiteful pleasure to the outside world than seeing strife and animosity within the church (see a similar rebuke in Rom. 2:24). All believers—but especially the

mature— are encouraged to rise above petty conflicts over non-essential, peripheral issues of daily life and focus on the central truths of kingdom living that apply to all: the “righteousness, peace, and joy” that are available “in the Holy Spirit” (v. 17). Such acquiescence to one another both pleases God and silences men (v. 18).