

Sermon Growth Guide

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THE WEAK AND THE STRONG | Romans 14:1-15

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Key Verse: 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."

Big Idea: On matters of opinion, even strong opinion, Christians are not to let their different views bring division into the church by condemning or despising one another. Rather, in love they are to restrict their own freedom so as not to become a stumbling block for a weaker believer.



Foundations

The early Roman church was composed of converted Gentiles and Jews living alongside one another in a highly pagan environment. Their own backgrounds led to strong difference of opinion on multiple issues. Here Paul deals with two: diet and calendar. Whether or not to eat meat involved the realization that meats bought from the public market invariably came from animal sacrifices performed at the multitudes of Greek and Roman temples honoring the pagan pantheons.

Was such meat tainted, having been devoted in worship to an idol? And which day of the week was the true God to be worshipped on – the Sabbath (Saturday), as God commanded the Jews, or the day of resurrection (Sunday) in honor of the New Creation inaugurated by Jesus? How does love navigate between personal freedom and concern for those in opposition?

Understanding God's Word

Together read Romans 14:1-15.

Paul identifies two groups within the church: the weak in faith, and by implication, the strong. His command to the strong is to welcome (a bit stronger, I think, than "accept") the weak. He is clear, though, that fellowship must not become a battleground over heated opinions. The strong in faith face the danger of despising the weak, of treating them with contempt and unworthy of respect because of their legalism. The weak face the danger of judgment and condemnation of the strong, believing them to be sinning against God by their failure to toe the line on matters of faith.

The key to success in both groups is their embrace of the deeper truth that all of us, whether "strong" or "weak", are equally servants of Christ. It is not the place of one servant to render judgment on the behavior

of another servant; that role belongs to the master. Concerning judgment, our only concern should be how we will answer to our Lord when we stand before Him.

Applying God's Word

On matters of opinion, where there are no clear commands of Scripture, where would you place yourself on the scale of "weak" to "strong" with regard to living out your discipleship in today's world? What are some contemporary issues with which Christians struggle and are prone to judge one another? Alcoholic beverages? Video, TV, movie content? Republican or Democrat? Worship styles? Tradition vs. innovation? Tattoos and piercings? How willing are you to offer grace and liberty to those who stand on the other side of these secondary issues?

Paul's ultimate conviction concerning others in the body of Christ is that he would do nothing that might be perceived as a stumbling block or hindrance to the faith of a fellow believer. If that meant constraining his own freedoms in Christ, so be it. My freedom in Christ is not of highest importance; love for the welfare of my fellow believers is.

Witnessing God's Word

Do you see any examples in the Church (across the globe) where the believing community exhibits love toward one another while the culture around it is riven by strife and condemnation? Do you see evidences of this in the life of First Pres? If not, why do you think that is? If so, what has contributed to this harmony trumping division? Where in your own life have you shown the willingness to limit your own freedoms in Christ out of love for others who might otherwise disobey their consciences by imitating you, or who might harm their souls by giving in to a condemnatory spirit against you?