Becoming Who We're Meant to Be
Series: Righteousness Revealed
Romans 15:1-13
Chadron Bible Church

The story is told of **two congregations** that were located only a few blocks apart from each other in a **small community**. They thought it might be better if they would **merge** and become one **united, larger, and more effective body** rather than two struggling churches. Good idea… but they were not able to pull it off. The problem? They could not agree on how they would recite the Lord's prayer. One group preferred "forgive us our trespasses," while the other group demanded "Forgive us our debts." So, as the **local newspaper reported**, "One church went back to its trespasses while the other returned to its debts."

Church conflict is **inevitable**. That's why the NT goes to great lengths dealing with **conflict resolution**. That's **the heart of Romans 14 and the first half of 15**. The **mixed, Jewish and Gentile** (non-Jewish) congregations at Rome were **struggling** to get along. Both groups had different **backgrounds** and therefore, different **sensitivities** to the certain things as they learned to **walk freely in Jesus**, in a way that pleases Him.

But I want to submit this morning that it is possible for **two** Christians, both **accepted** by God, both **approved** by God, to have **different convictions** in **gray areas**—areas in life where there is no right or wrong. But **also that** by **choosing to accept one another** as is—**despite their differences**—they could **advance** the **mission** of the church and fulfill the very **purpose** for their existence? To do the very thing they were created to do? Be the people they were meant to be? And become a **tangible, God-glorifying picture of hope** in a desperately broken world? That's what we want to talk about today as Paul comes to a conclusion on the conversation started last week.

Framework for faithful living & what a **transformed life** looks like (12:1-2):

1. Harbor **humility** in God's household. (12:3-8)
2. **Love** others as Jesus loves us. (12:9-21)
3. **Clothe** ourselves with Christlike conduct. (13:1-14)
4. Give **grace** in the grays. (14:1-23)
5. Prioritize **people** and **purpose** over personal preferences. (15:1-14)

1 Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. 2 Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.

As a reminder, the **weak in this context** were primarily Jewish believers hung up on dietary laws and observance of the Jewish calendar. Some of their conscience's were so rigid that they didn't eat meat at all. They had no way of knowing if meat at the butcher was sacrificed to an idol or not or if it touched other unclean animals so they just became vegetarians (14:2). This is why I eat meat. He who is weak eats vegetables only. No, it's actually weak in conscience. They have

the freedom to eat meat. Nothing's unclean. But they weren't used to that New Covenant freedom. They had a **hard time letting go** of all those great traditions and things they were brought up with from the OT. And Paul said they are fine to continue practicing those things as long as they don't make it a matter of salvation or try to force their personal convictions on the rest of the church.

The **strong in faith** were primarily Gentiles who understood that in Christ, in the New Covenant, they were free from those things entirely. They could eat the **BLT**. They could go out to Red Lobster and eat all the **shrimp** and **lobster** they want. And they could do it on **Saturday**. Not being able to do that would be foreign to them. They've never had those stipulations in mind.

So, as you can imagine, things weren't going well at the **fellowship dinners**. They were sort of **looking down upon** one another for their differences in these gray areas. They may have looked at each other with **contempt**. **Avoiding** one another. Maybe **insulting** one another.

And we could sum up what Paul has said already with, *"Accept one another because God has accepted them both."* **Today we're going to ask WHY? Why must they accept one another?**

1. **It creates a culture where people can grow/built up. (15:1-2)**

In verse 1, Paul **identifies himself among the strong**. *"**We** who are strong."* Theologically, Paul sides with the strong. He knows it's okay to eat bacon. There's nothing clean or unclean anymore. Doesn't have to observe the sabbath, etc. But **just because you can doesn't mean you always should.** Save the BLT for home so that you don't make your brother stumble.

So this passage starts out mainly **addressing the strong** again. The mature Christians with the freedom ought to take the initiative. But **what are the strong to do?**

Bear
They are to *"**bear** the weakness of those without strength."* It doesn't mean to just **tolerate** the weak or **put up** with the weak. It doesn't mean to **confirm** their weakness or even let their weaknesses be **forced upon** the church. It means to **roll up your sleeves** and really **help** them along. You see them struggling so you **stop** or **slow down** and **help carry their burden**.

Willing to Adjust Your Pace
Last week I shared the illustration of a parent and child for the strong and the weak. An adult who is mature **can** walk a lot faster than the child. But does that mean they **should**? No, not if they're holding the child's hand or want the child to keep up. They might make them stumble. The strong sometimes need to be willing to **adjust their pace** to help the weak. One of my children's devos said it best, "Slow down for the turtles in your life. Not everyone is as fast as you. Not everyone is where you're at." This is something **God is constantly doing with us. Slowing down, meeting us where we're at, and encouraging us along**.

Build Up
The term **edify** or **build up** is a **construction** term. The antonym would be to tear down or destroy. We are trying to build others up. Make them strong. **Solidify** them. Help free them.

Recovery Programs
The application is wide, but recovery ministries are a great picture of what we're talking about here. Someone who was once a slave to a substance or behavior finds freedom in Christ. They become passionate about that freedom. But instead of just preaching freedom to others, instead of just handing a Bible to them and saying, "Good luck!", they come **alongside** others who are struggling and do what they can to help free them. Most recovery programs are led by those who were helped by it. It becomes their ministry.

Culture Created
So this is really healthy to think about the type of church culture we want to foster. Healthy it is:

- The **strong are considerate of the weak**, willing to help them carry their load. What if we all said, "Hey, I know you're struggling with such and such, but we're in this together and I'm going to help you carry your load. We're going to learn to walk with Jesus together."
- The **weak are considerate of the strong**, and said, "Hey, I don't have the freedom you do yet. My conscience is still a little perturbed by that, but I know you know Jesus, and I appreciate your loving support. Let's do this together."

So at the end of the day, there's **no legalism**. There's **no condemnation**. But there is **freedom** and there is **harmony**. Real **ministry** is taking place. It's almost like an **ideal church environmen**t, right?

Accept one another because…
2. You're imitating <u>Christ's</u> attitude of <u>selflessness</u>. (15:3, 7)

3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."

Paul quotes Psalm 69 to show that by putting **people above personal preferences** we are **modeling** Christ. **Imitating** Christ. He bore the reproaches, the **insults** of others. Why? For the glory of God and to help us become strong. Out of selfless love.

His **whole human life**, from stepping out of heaven to be born as a man, to His death on the cross, is a picture of selfless love. **He was strong but He became weak to help us become strong. Now it's our turn.**

Let me ask you: what is the **cardinal virtue** of Christianity? Is it faith? Hope? No? Love. The greatest is love. Galatians 6:2 says to *"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."* The law of Christ is the law of love. Christ didn't simply issue the law of love. He lived it. We're called to adopt that same attitude. If a church is going to stick together with all their

differences, they've got to keep Christ at the center. Becoming more like Jesus is our chief responsibility as Christians.

Accept one another because…

3. You're participating in the <u>common</u> story of <u>hope</u>. (15:4; 8-13)

4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

This a great reminder that **God wants us to know His Word**. Bible based. He wrote things for us to understand in it. They **encourage** us and help us **persevere** even when things are hard. Even when there's conflict. Even when people are hard. Because people are what God is all about. And we're all **part of His story**.

When we think about what was written in earlier times, going all the way back to Genesis, we need to see ourselves as part of the story. The big picture. God has been writing for thousands of years: Adam, Noah, Moses, David, Jesus, Paul, John… the story just continues with us until Jesus comes back. It **culminates in the hope of a new heaven and earth** where **all of humanity—Jew and Gentile—live in harmony** with God and with each other. Do yourself a favor this week and read the last two chapters of the Bible. God dwells with us. Everything is restored. There is **no curse**. There is **no conflict**. **That's our hope. Don't you want that?**

So why not, by the power of the Holy Spirit, apply that ***today***? To, as God wills, live that out ***right here and right now*** so that the desperately broken and divided world can get a glimpse of the way things are supposed to be? Pre-curse? Post-curse? Then we'll be that light in a dark world. To become who we're meant to be right now.

Our **common hope we have whether strong or weak, should produce a unity that will not be disrupted by issues that don't carry the weight we tend to put on them. The Christian life isn't** just about receiving a ticket to heaven, but **participating** in the story with our lives.

But **to do this is going to require some help from God.** In verse 5, he **prays** for that.
5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Accept one another because…

4. You're carrying out your purpose to <u>glorify</u> God. (15:5-6)

So Paul asks for **divine help** for them to carry this out. Perseverance and encouragement come from God. I don't know how many times I'm feeling tired or discouraged and I pray to God for strength for the day to serve Him and an hour goes by and I think man, God answered that prayer. I didn't feel like I could serve that day but God gave me a really great message or something like that. I didn't think I could have that difficult conversation, but I prayed and God gave me strength. To do this, we have to rely on Him.

The phrase **be of the same mind** does **not** mean all believers have to be of the **same opinion**. Again, we just discussed that last week. It's not about **uniformity**. It's that ***despite their differences*** they should still have a unity and harmony so that they can glorify God with one voice. One accord. Many people. One voice. Glorifying God. Again, another picture of heaven and eternity. All believers gathered around the throne glorifying God. It's what will be. So why not now?

More vision. Less discussion.
One man said you know sometimes churches in conflict **don't need more discussion**. They just need a **higher vision and mission**. The need reminded the **bigger picture**. That **God's story and plan and program** is far greater than their personal opinions. The big picture guides us through lesser things.

Do you remember the comical church conflicts I shared last week? This week I read about a church split over **where to place the piano**. I also heard recently about a church down the road, that finally closed its doors because someone hung a **tv in the worship center for visual aid**. That was the straw that broke the camel's back, they said. That's exactly what we're talking about. A church like that isn't thinking about the mission. The vision. The picture of hope the church is to be to the world. The church is to be different.

We need to accept one another and have our priorities right so we can glorify God together.

7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Again, referring back to Jesus' acceptance of us, Paul now says it's our turn to accept each other. Jesus brought the Father **glory** by His selfless giving of Himself and acceptance of us. He **welcomed** us despite our faults. Our blind spots. Our ignorance. Our prejudices. Naiveties. Stubbornness. **Now it's our turn.** Why? For God to be glorified.

Now, I think he turns to both the weak and the strong, the Jew and the Gentile, to remind them that Christ **already has** accepted them both.

*8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the **circumcision [the Jews]** on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9 **and** for the **Gentiles** to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "Therefore I will give praise to You among the Gentiles, And I will sing to Your name." 10 Again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people." 11 And again, "Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise Him." 12 Again Isaiah says, "There shall come the root of Jesse, And He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, In Him shall the Gentiles hope."*

So basically, he reminds the Jews that Jesus came to carry out the **promises** made to their **forefathers**: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jospeh, David. Jesus confirmed all that. He honored those covenants, kept those covenants, and will continue to **see them through**. Just because He has turned to the Gentiles doesn't mean He's done with the Jews.

But, in keeping with the Abrahamic promise in Genesis 12:1-3, He also became a **blessing to all nations**—Gentiles as well. To prove his point, Paul did what good rabbis do, and what He did at the end of Romans 9, and quotes **the 3 major sections of the OT**: **the Law, Prophets, and Writings** to prove this great **Gentile inclusion has always been in the plan.** If you've been with us, it takes you right back to Romans 11 where He talked about God showing **mercy to all.** Jews had a special **covenant** with God, but Gentiles were **included based on His mercy**.

It's a reminder of the Gospel story. That at the end of the day, the story is about **people coming together in the name of Jesus to be one people to glorify Him**. **To let the current conflicts divide them would be to work against that purpose.**

He ends with one final, **prayerful benediction**, verse 13: Most consider this the **final portion of the formal instruction** in Romans.
13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Joy, peace, and hope stand out here. This is another reminder that if this is going to happen—if the weak and strong are going to get along and they're going to be this people **known for joy and peace**—they've got to depend on God and His Spirit. And joy and peace will always be more important than eating and drinking. Wine and BLT's.

Joy and peace among them will result in hope. They will have hope. They will be a picture of hope. A tangible expression of hope in a desperately divided world.

This morning before I even left my house, I thought about our vision and mission. Just about everything in our vision and mission statement is in this last portion of Romans:

- Welcoming/accepting community
- From all walks of life
- Bible based.
- Christ-centered
- Growing in our love of God and people
- Helping others along
- Providing hope

How awesome is that? I'm sad that God has given me a new assignment but I'm thankful He's left this family with such a well-rounded vision & mission for the time.