

**THERE IS NO ROOM FOR TOLERANCE IN CHURCH
ROMANS 14:1-12**

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M.I. LIVING IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CALLS US TO BE FAR MORE THAN TOLERANT OF PEOPLE WHO HOLD DIFFERENT VIEWS. CHRISTIAN LOVE CALLS ON US TO EMBRACE ONE ANOTHER.

I. WE ARE SAVED THE SAME WAY (VS 1-3)

BECAUSE OF JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS-, WE ARE NO LONGER DESPISED OR CONDEMNED BY GOD. IN FACT, WE ARE BELOVED, FORGIVEN, AND ACCEPTED. THEREFORE, WE ARE NOT TO DESPISE OR CONDEMN ONE ANOTHER.

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THERE IS NO ROOM FOR TOLERANCE IN CHURCH
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So far in chapters 12 and 13, Paul has been giving us some general guidelines as to what walking in love should look like. In chapters 14 and 15, he takes these general principles and applies them to some very specific situations that the church in Rome was facing.

It seems that when we face disagreement about how to approach everyday questions in life, a threat to the unity of the community presents itself. In other words, it is natural to think that my way of approaching a particular problem or situation is the right way, and other people's approaches are wrong.

When those problems, situations, and different approaches present themselves in a religious community, the conflict takes on more importance and the threat of disunity increases greatly. Why? Because each person thinks they are representing God's view. No doubt the greatest wars in history have been over religion.

If you don't think that differences threaten the unity of the community, just stop and think how many Christian denominations there are. Paul recognized that the unity of the church in Rome was in jeopardy. The particular issues they faced may seem far removed from us here at our little church, but if we examine them carefully, we can immediately see that they may be closer than we think.

Here is what we have to understand. Most of us here are evangelicals. That means that we believe that the Bible is absolutely true. And when we argue a point of view, we all claim to be taking our views from the Bible.

The problem appears when we see that even though we are in agreement that the Bible is true and is the inerrant word of God, we find that we interpret it differently, ... sometimes, ...

much differently. During the next three or four sermons, we will examine how the Apostle Paul instructs us to handle these differences.

Our culture tells us that we are to handle these differences by being tolerant with one another. In fact, that is the fashionable word in political correctness today. We are to be religiously and politically tolerant of other people's views. That of course assumes that there is ultimately no right or wrong, and certainly no ultimate truth. And I guess in this sort of world and this sort of culture, the best we can do is to be tolerant of one another.

But in the Christian community, being tolerant of one another is not acceptable. Think about what it means to be tolerant. I tolerate the pain of going to the dentist because I don't want my teeth to fall out. I tolerate standing in long lines to buy Chicago Cubs' tickets because I want to see the game. I tolerate the traffic jams in order to get to work. I'm sure you have to tolerate bosses, coworkers, and even jobs you don't particularly care for in order to pay the bills. We learn to tolerate undesirable people and situations we just have to endure.

However, Paul has commanded us not to just tolerate one another, he commanded us to love one another just like Jesus loves us. Jesus doesn't tolerate us. He passionately loves us. He died for us.

Let me give you an example of how tolerating others can blow up in our faces. You remember that church that I used to pastor; the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?) It was so tough that they would simply tolerate one another until they couldn't take it any more. One Sunday morning, a soloist was singing in a high-pitched voice, well beyond her vocal range. She came to the phrase, "He's the fairest of ten thousand," and her voice broke as she came to the word "ten."

Because of pride, she tried again, but met with no greater success the second time.

“Give me my note again,” she requested of the pianist, and made a frantic third attempt.

Finally, from the congregation a guy called out, “Lady, I don’t think you’re going to make it. Don’t you think you’d better start over again and try for five thousand this time?”

We must learn to embrace one another, not merely tolerate one another.

Paul recognized that there were differing views concerning some religious practices that threatened to split the church. His advice to them would serve us well when we find ourselves differing with someone else’s theology. **LIVING IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CALLS US TO BE FAR MORE THAN TOLERANT OF PEOPLE WHO HOLD DIFFERENT VIEWS. CHRISTIAN LOVE CALLS ON US TO EMBRACE ONE ANOTHER.** In other words, when it comes to the non-essentials of the faith, love and unity are the themes that are to guide our relationship with one another. Now let me say this up front so there is no confusion. These issues are not about the non-negotiable of the faith. In other words, when it comes to the absolutes such as whether or not Jesus is fully God and fully man, when it comes to salvation by faith alone, when it comes to clear commands of Scripture that almost all evangelicals agree on, the governing principle is truth. But let me quickly add, there are many more disputable issues that present themselves in churches than clear absolutes.

And here is where people deceive themselves. They will say, “See here, it’s CLEAR from the Scriptures that my view is correct.” Here is a pretty good measure for you to see if the matter is a non-negotiable or if it is a disputable matter. If honest-to-goodness evangelicals disagree as to the interpretation of an issue, the chances are that is not as clear as you think it is. In this case, the principles we are studying today apply. Let me just give us some examples of disputable matters the Christian church faces today. Social drinking, social dancing, smoking,

going to movies, wearing jewelry, not working or playing on Sunday, divorce and remarriage, women's ordination, the method and mode of baptism, are all issues that evangelicals hold differing views on. These issues should probably be approached like Paul approaches the issues in the church at Rome.

I. WE ARE SAVED THE SAME WAY (VS 1-3)
BECAUSE OF JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS-, WE ARE NO LONGER DESPISED OR CONDEMNED BY GOD. IN FACT, WE ARE BELOVED, FORGIVEN, AND ACCEPTED. THEREFORE, WE ARE NOT TO DESPISE OR CONDEMN ONE ANOTHER.

In verses 1-3 Paul calls us back to an indisputable truth, namely that we are all saved the same way. The ramification of that is, **BECAUSE OF JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS-, WE ARE NO LONGER DESPISED OR CONDEMNED BY GOD. IN FACT, WE ARE BELOVED, FORGIVEN, AND ACCEPTED. THEREFORE, WE ARE NOT TO DESPISE OR CONDEMN ONE ANOTHER.**

A. THE CONFLICT (2)

In verse 2, we are introduced to one of the conflicts. It has to do with diet. Now based on how Paul has been addressing the community throughout the book of Romans, it appears that this debate would be taking place between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. One group feels free to eat anything, while the other group feels restricted to only vegetables. When the Jews were taken into captivity, there would be no way to know if the meat put before them was kosher. In other words, they didn't know if the animal was clean, they didn't know how it was butchered, and they didn't know if the meat had been a part of some cultic religious practice. Therefore, we find Jews such as Daniel, eating only vegetables in Babylon.

On the other hand, most Gentiles, the non-Jews in Rome probably ate everything and anything they could get their hands on. They had no problems eating anything.

Here is where the problem came in. The early conception of church was much different from our idea of church. We view religion as a very private matter. The early church viewed their faith as communal. By the way, in about a couple of months, I will be hoping to correct our mistaken views of what the church is. I will be preaching a five-week series on what the nature and purpose of church are. The people of the church in Rome spent a lot of time together. They worshipped together, they ate together, they supported one another. In fact their lives were centered around the church. And keep in mind church is not a building or institution. Church is the gathering of believers. They were intimately involved in one another's lives.

Now if one person was a vegetarian and another was a meat eater, that would be no problem. However, the Jewish Christians wanted to put religious meaning on keeping kosher. In other words, they felt it was a sin to eat meat that might possibly be unclean. And believe me, it's not too hard to make that case. The idea of keeping kosher in the Old Testament was to separate them from their neighbors. God commanded them to be set apart from the culture they found themselves in. Since these Jews were raised this way, it was hard for them to let these concepts go.

Now look at the wording here. Paul identifies the Jewish believers here as the ones whose faith is weak. Weak faith here does not refer to their saving faith. It doesn't indicate they have a lack of self-control or that they are easily overcome by temptation. What it does mean is that they are weak in regards to their freedom in Christ. They feel much more comfortable in relating to God through religious rules. Their assurance of salvation is directly tied to their behavior. In other words, if they are following the rules perfectly, then they feel they are in a right relationship with God. Their faith is weak because if we base anything on our behavior, we are always unsure of where we are with God.

We would call this the legalistic approach to Christianity. In other words, this group of people would tend to take a very literalistic approach to the Bible and turn the Christian life into do's and don'ts. A long time ago, when Moody Bible Institute was much more fundamentalist, their students would have to come to Trinity to finish their senior year to receive a BA degree. They thought that we Trinity students were pagans. At any rate they used to proudly define themselves like this. They would say, "I don't drink and I don't chew, and I don't go with girls who do." And many of my friends and classmates defined their Christianity like that. I think there may have been a time, a short time, when I defined my Christianity like that as well.

Now there are still many Christians and whole denominations that define their Christianity like this. Some believe you should only have organs and pianos in church, no guitars and drums. Some churches won't allow any musical instruments. Some forbid wearing jewelry, demand that women wear hats or scarves, and dresses, no pants. Some won't go to movies and some forbid women to hold positions of authority. There are many Christians who diligently spend their lives trying to keep the rules. While others seem to simply enjoy their walk with God. How are we to approach one another when we hold such diametrically opposed views?

B. EMBRACING THE WEAK (1 & 3a)

In verse 1 and in the first half of verse 3 Paul commands us to embrace the weak. Look at the first word in verse 1. Our English translations say accept and that is correct but it is the most powerful usage of accept. It literally means to carry oneself to. We are to embrace one another. Did you get that? When we come in contact with legalistic Christians, we are not merely to tolerate them, we are to embrace them. We are not to pass judgment on them. The meaning here is that we are not to argue with them. We are not to debate them. We are not to

quarrel with them. When it comes to disputable matters, we are to let it go. The church is not a place for constant debate, especially concerning these issues. That is simple enough. But look at the first sentence in verse 3. Those who enjoy their freedom in Christ are not to look down on the weak. The word there to look down on means to despise them. It's easy to criticize the people caught up in legalism. We say things like, "They're crazy. What's wrong with those people? I can't stand to be around them." Listen to those of us who think our faith is strong. Paul says that there will be none of that. If we really are strong, our egos won't get in the way. If we really are strong, we will not look down on them. If we really are strong, we will not only put up with them, we will embrace them.

I have a lot of pastor friends who I think tend to be legalistic. I admire them for their self-discipline and their clean lifestyles. They are good men and women. I have learned a lot from them over the years.

C. EMBRACING THE STRONG (3b)

So those whose faith are strong are commanded by Paul to embrace those whose faith are weak. In the second half of verse 3 Paul commands the weak in faith to embrace the strong. Think about how much harder this must be. Paul commands those who won't eat certain foods not to condemn those who do. Let's say that you were raised in a church that taught it was a sin to drink alcohol, a sin to wear jewelry, and a sin for a woman to wear pants. All of a sudden you see your cousin with some big dangling earrings, perhaps even a belly button ring, wearing pants, a cutoff shirt, drinking a glass of wine. What goes off in your head? ... Hell! She's going to Hell! It would be hard for you to think otherwise. And if she's one of your favorite cousins, what do you want to do? You want to go right over there and correct her sinful behavior. Don't you?

The only problem is that when you go over to correct her, she tells you that her walk with the Lord was never better. She says that she is attending church and prayer meeting regularly, she is reading and studying her Bible daily, and she has been growing by leaps and bounds. In fact, she is thinking of going onto the mission field.

Now your head wants to explode because all that data doesn't go together in your mind. The great temptation for strong Christians is to look down on and despise weak Christians. The great temptation for weak, legalistic Christians is to judge others. Paul commands legalistic Christians not to judge and condemn others. You see, it's pretty simple to be a legalistic Christianity. Actually it's not because if you were brutally honest with yourself, you would have to see that you are not even close to keeping the rules. But it is comfortable to be legalistic. I follow the rules and I think I'm O.K. Those who don't follow the rules are lost. Paul wants the legalist to know that their interpretation of reality is skewed. So don't judge others. And it would be a good idea not to argue and try and convince others that you're right.

D. GOD EMBRACES THE WEAK AND THE STRONG (3c)

Look at the reasoning behind accepting one another. The last phrase in verse 3 reminds us that God embraces both the weak and the strong. Before we became believers, we were enemies of God. We stood under God's judgment and condemnation. We were totally unacceptable to God. We were alienated from God. When we placed our faith and trust in Jesus, We were forgiven. We were accepted. We were loved. If God no longer condemns us, if God no longer looks down on us, then we are not to judge or to look down on one another. Here is the first reason we are to embrace one another. **BECAUSE OF JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS-, WE ARE NO LONGER DESPISED OR CONDEMNED BY GOD. IN FACT,**

WE ARE BELOVED, FORGIVEN, AND ACCEPTED. THEREFORE, WE ARE NOT TO DESPISE OR CONDEMN ONE ANOTHER. We were saved the same way.

II. **WE SERVE THE SAME MASTER (VS 4-9)**
SINCE WE ARE ALL SERVING JESUS, WE MUST EACH SERVE IN GOOD CONSCIENCE AND ALLOW EACH OTHER TO SERVE IN GOOD CONSCIENCE.

The next reason we are to embrace one another is spelled out in verses 4-9. We serve the same master. The guiding principle here is this. **SINCE WE ARE ALL SERVING JESUS, WE MUST EACH SERVE IN GOOD CONSCIENCE AND ALLOW EACH OTHER TO SERVE IN GOOD CONSCIENCE.** In other words, we are to be convinced in our own hearts of how we are to serve God. Don't follow some teacher or pastor or anyone. Each one of us must serve God with a clear conscience. I'm not your conscience and you're not mine. I'm not the Holy Spirit and neither are you. Paul uses another conflict going on in the church to get to this conclusion.

A. **THE CONFLICT (5a & 6)**

In the first half of verse 5 and verse 6 we are introduced to conflict over another practice. The legalistic group emphasized holy days. The Jews would continue to take Sabbath very seriously and do absolutely no work. They would most likely continue to celebrate Passover and the other festivals. On the other hand, the Gentile believers felt one day was no different from the rest. Those who are free in Christ tend to live the motto, "This is the day that the LORD has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it."

There is still a lot of debate over what is legitimate types of activity for Sundays. Some people won't go to sporting events or shopping. Some won't do chores. Some still believe that we ought to worship on Saturday.

B. **THE PERSPECTIVE (7-9)**

How are we to decide? Verses 7-9 give us some perspective. Before we do that, look quickly back at verse 4. Paul asks, “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant?” I want you to catch the full force of this. Can you imagine some person coming into your house and giving orders to your husband and your children? Let’s say she’s sitting on the couch and she says to your husband, “You should pick up your socks and put them in the hamper.” She starts telling your kids how they should play and what they should be reading and what they should be doing.” She tells the kids to go and set the table, to get washed up for dinner, etc.” I don’t think it would take you long before you told this lady to shut up and get out. The point is that we belong to God. I am not the judge. I am not your Lord. In fact I’m no one’s Lord. There is one Lord, Jesus Christ. He is the One Who judges. And since we received Him in faith, He has already declared us to be not guilty.

Verses 7-9 remind us that He became our Lord through His death and resurrection. We belong to Him. Our thoughts, our actions, our words, should all reflect that Jesus is our Lord. Keep this in mind. There is nothing in life or death that can ever separate us from God’s love. He is the One we must stand before, not each other. The perspective we gain is twofold. First of all, I am no one’s judge. Secondly, when we do make a decision, we must remember that we stand only before God.

C. THE RESOLUTION (5b-6)

The second half of verse 5 and verse 6 contain the resolution. Whatever we do, we should be sure and do it to the glory of God. Every day should be holy. Every day is a gift from God. The strong learn to celebrate life. Again, if the weak in faith insist on emphasizing special days with special behavior, they must do so before God alone. The strong are not to judge.

And the early church would notice this. Before they ate, they all prayed. The weak prayed over their vegetables. The strong prayed over their meat. The point is that both are trying to honor God. So the legalist is actually trying to honor God. The strong should not make fun of them or ridicule them. They are sincere before God.

On the other hand, the strong honor God with their freedom. The weak should not judge them. The ruling principle here is that we must act out of good conscience knowing that Jesus is our Lord. A good balance for our own consciences would be this. The legalists, weak Christians, must remind themselves that we are saved by faith. The strong Christians, who live freely, must remind themselves that we were bought with a price. What we do must honor God.

SINCE WE ARE ALL SERVING JESUS, WE MUST EACH SERVE IN GOOD CONSCIENCE AND ALLOW EACH OTHER TO SERVE IN GOOD CONSCIENCE.

III. WE ARE IN THE SAME FAMILY (VS 10-12)

SINCE WE ARE IN THE SAME FAMILY, WE MUST NOT ONLY TOLERATE ONE ANOTHER, WE MUST LOVE AND EMBRACE ONE ANOTHER.

And finally, in verses 10-12 Paul says we should embrace one another because we are in the same family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. **SINCE WE ARE IN THE SAME FAMILY, WE MUST NOT ONLY TOLERATE ONE ANOTHER, WE MUST LOVE AND EMBRACE ONE ANOTHER.**

Paul said that in God's family there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, free nor slave. God makes no distinctions. We are all simply His beloved children.

A. MANY CHILDREN (10)

Verse 10 describes many children. Paul's point is this. It doesn't matter if we are legalistic Christians, trying to keep all the rules, or it doesn't matter if we are enjoying our freedom in Christ, we all started from the same place. He established that back in Romans

chapters 1, 2, & 3. He said that all of us were born into sin and all of us had willfully sinned against God. In our natural state, we were all alienated from God and destined to spend an eternity in hell. It was through placing ourselves in the hands of Jesus by faith, that He changed our eternal destinies from death to life. We all received salvation by grace through faith. Since we have all been saved by grace through faith, and since God no longer condemns us, we are not to judge one another. We are indeed brothers and sisters in Christ. And because we are brothers and sisters, we are to love one another. That means that we neither condemn one another, nor do we look down on one another. Weak or strong, legalistic or liberal, like it or not, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. I want to say this in the strongest possible way. If you are a legalist, then you must stop trying to tell your brothers and sisters how to live. If you authentically feel you are trying to honor God by following rules, then do so. However, don't try to impose this on others. And don't try and tell them they are not honoring God by not following these rules. And please never forget, you were saved by grace through faith, not keeping rules.

On the other hand, those of us who tend to be more liberated in our faith, we must never look down on nor despise those that are legalistic. Did we hear that? Here is the perspective we must keep in mind. These people are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are related to them and we are to respect them as equal partners in the Gospel. And we would do well to view them as a reminder that we are not free to do anything we want. We were bought at a very high price. We were bought with the blood of Jesus.

You see the diversity is good. We who feel more liberated in Christ can be reminded by our legalist brothers and sisters that not any and everything is O.K. And our legalist brothers and sisters can be reminded by us that ultimately salvation is a gift we receive by grace through faith. We are free from religious, legalistic ways of trying to earn God's favor and love.

B. ONE FATHER (11)

Verse 11 makes it clear that we are family because we have One Father. This quote is from Isaiah 45. A form of this appears in Paul's letter to the Philippians. God is saying, "I am God and there is no other." In other words, I am not the judge and you are not the judge. We all stand before the One true and living God. Indeed one day, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father.

And we learn what kind of loving Father God is in Luke 15 where Jesus tells the story of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. God is a loving and passionate Father. Through Jesus, He calls us beloved children. So Paul's point is this. When a legalist looks at a more liberated Christian, she should only see a child of God. When the more liberated believer looks at the legalist, he should only see a child of God. We are brothers and sisters because we have the same Father.

C. ONE DESTINY (12)

Not only that, but as verse 12 points out, we share one destiny. If we have all been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, then we will all be spending an eternity together. We will definitely get along in heaven. And if that is the case and we continue to pray to God that His kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven, then we better live like Kingdom people now. We better learn to love, accept, and embrace one another, right here, right now. Verse 12 says that each of us will have to give an account of ourselves to God. In no uncertain terms, we have just been told by God through the Apostle Paul that we are not to judge one another nor are we to look down on one another. Instead we are to embrace one another. Why? **SINCE WE ARE IN THE SAME FAMILY, WE MUST NOT ONLY TOLERATE ONE ANOTHER, WE MUST LOVE AND EMBRACE ONE ANOTHER.**

This is no easy task. But the command is clear. In fact, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount He said, "Don't judge others if you don't want to be judged." I really hope no one leaves here this morning without understanding how radical this Christian command to love is. **LIVING IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CALLS US TO BE FAR MORE THAN TOLERANT OF PEOPLE WHO HOLD DIFFERENT VIEWS. CHRISTIAN LOVE CALLS ON US TO EMBRACE ONE ANOTHER.**

In his book Mortal Lessons, a surgeon, Dr. Richard Selzer gives a beautiful illustration of how we are to embrace one another in love.

A Holy Love

Writes a surgeon: I stand by the bed where a young woman lies, her face postoperative, her mouth twisted in palsy, clownish. A tiny twig of the facial nerve, the one to the muscles of her mouth, has been severed. She will be thus from now on. The surgeon has followed with religious fervor the curve of her flesh; I promise you that. Nevertheless, to remove the tumor in her cheek, I had to cut the little nerve.

Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed, and together they seem to dwell in the evening lamplight, isolated from me, private. Who are they, I ask myself, he and this wry-mouth I have made, who gaze at and touch each other so generously, greedily? The young woman speaks.

"Will my mouth always be like this?" she asks.

"Yes," I say, "it will. It is because the nerve was cut."

She nods and is silent. But the young man smiles. "I like it," he says. "It is kind of cute."

All at once I know who he is. I understand, and I lower my gaze. One is not bold in an encounter with a God. Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth, and I so close can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers, to show her that their kiss still works.

Dr. Richard Selzer, *Mortal Lessons* (San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace).

We are all distorted by sin. God calls us to embrace one another even through all our distortions.