

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

DATE

January 28, 2024

SPEAKER

Brian Frost

SERIES

Better Together

PART

4

TITLE

Welcoming One Another In An Age of Division

SCRIPTURE

Romans 14:1-23; Hebrews 3:12-14



© 2022 Providence Church (Raleigh, NC)

Sermon transcripts may be used for preaching and teaching purposes, but may not be published or sold. While generally accurate, parts of this transcript may contain errors.

Providence reserves the right to correct and/or remove a transcript at any time.

For the last couple of years we've shared a vision to reach and we've asked God to continually expand our hearts towards people. And one of the ways we feel led to reach our city is to plant new churches. As our city is growing at rapid rates, we want to be strategic to plant new churches in high-growth areas, outside of a 20-minute drive from Providence. And so we've prayed, we've dreamed, and we've planned, and we believe God continues to lead. And so, we're excited to share that Cornerstone Church will be launched on Easter Sunday at Wakefield Middle School, in the Wakefield Wake Forest area. And so, of the 130,000 people that live in that area, less than one quarter have a personal relationship with Christ. God has already called many families to go and we're so thankful for the strong team he's building.

Hi, my name is Luke. This is my wife Emily, and we are excited to join with Providence Church to be planting Cornerstone Church in the Wake Forest Wakefield area.

Absolutely. And our family is overjoyed to share our values with you. We are motivated by the mission of God. We are surrendered to his scriptures, and we are powered by prayer in the advancement of his kingdom here in the Wakefield and Wake Forest area.

See, we believe that the church is God's plan for salvation for this world today. And church planting is a part of that. It's our way of engaging in the mission of God moving forward. It's our way of spreading the mission of God moving forward.

Reaching those in an area and where we live is a sweet opportunity. Trying to be able to blend neighbors and friends, and friends of our kids, blend those together with the church, with the body and to be able to evangelize in those same communities is a blessing.

When we heard about the Wakefield Plant Cornerstone, this was something, a prayer that the Lord was answering for us.

We would love for you and your family to be involved in what God is doing up in Wakefield. There are several ways you can do that. First, I want you to pray, all of us to pray. Pray that God moves in Wakefield. Pray that God moves with Cornerstone Church. Pray that God would move you to be involved in the church plant. If you're looking for more information, you can go to [www.pray.org/multiplication](http://www.pray.org/multiplication), or feel free to reach out to me directly if you want to be involved with our launch team, we would love to have you be a part of that. You can join us at 9:30 for live groups or at 11 o'clock as we worship together. I can't wait to see what God is going to do in Wakefield, and I would love for you and your family to be a part of it.

Providence family, it's great to see you. If you're a guest with us today, I am really glad that you're here. For those of you who are online, we're glad you've joined us, and for those over in Prisms, we're so thankful for you, your sacrifice. I know you couldn't fit in this room, and so thank you for making room for those who are here. I hope you've had a really good week. That's really to all of you.

I've been asked a few times, I think it's a fitting question, do you really want us to leave Providence to go to something like this? And here's how I would respond to that, okay? What I really desire to see and what we desire, like your leaders, what we desire is for you to see the glory of Christ, that you would see the glory of

God in the face of Christ, that you become overwhelmed by his majesty, his faithfulness, his goodness, how worthy he is, and that that would propel you to make every decision for the rest of your life, that it would influence, and steer, and give some direction, that your entire life would be oriented around Christ.

And so, what we desire is that every one of us, that we would willingly, and you would only do this if you've seen the glory of Christ, is that each one of us would willingly extend ourself to the point of discomfort if it was necessary in order to help people to become followers of Christ. Nobody reaches to the place where it causes them discomfort unless they intend and believe that what they are reaching with is worthwhile. And so, we want you to see and love Christ, and to extend your life. And so what I want to ask you to do is not to go. What I want to ask you to do is to pray and to pray with your yes on the table. You see, if we believe the Bible is true, then the Bible tells us that God is good and that what God would tell us to do is good.

That which he would instruct us is for our benefit, that we would be able to flourish and be a part of his will. And so, whatever it is that he would tell us to do would be good for us. And so, in this and every decision, we come to him and we say, "God, I'm going to ask you what you want from me," but before you tell me, I want you to know in advance my answer is yes.

And if you do that and of the Lord inclines your heart, he puts a desire. Psalm 37:4 says, "If you delight yourself in the Lord, he gives you the desires of your heart," which doesn't mean he gives you what you want, it means he gives you what you want to. He puts a desire in your heart that aligns with his will for your life, and so that you end up doing what you desire.

If he tells you and puts a desire upon your heart to go, then I hope you'll go. And if he puts a desire for you to stay, I hope that you will stay. If you stay or if you go, I want to say you a few things. First of all, if you stay, we need your help. I say this thing over and over again and you keep helping. And so, I'm so thankful for that. But we need your help. Again, there's a lot of people at Providence in particular this hour, at this season of our life, of this church, we're thankful for all the people who are here. And a lot of you're here, because people have seen the glory of Christ and they've invited you, and they want you to see what they've seen, and to experience what they've experienced. This isn't the only place, but this for them perhaps is where they did experience.

And so, they're reaching and they're praying for people. And as a result of you praying and reaching and inviting, more people are here. As such, there's a few places where when you try to get too many people into one space at the same time, it causes, it's a little tight. And so, this service happens to be the one where it is the tightest, but there's two other areas. And so, there's three areas you can help with, okay? One is the service, one is parking, which I know can be a challenge. And then third is with kids. These areas, for some of you, you need to come to the service, but if it would be possible for you to come to the eight o'clock service, I know it's early, but that's when the Holy Spirit comes, right?

I'm just kidding. He's here all the time. He's here all three services you're here. So he's here with you, right? But it is a wonderful service. I know it's early, I know it's early, but there is space there. And so, I would encourage you to think about that. Second, when it comes to worship is, we have life groups that are chosen

and they rotate through the secondary room over here at a month at a time, but there's still more chairs there than there are in here that are empty. And so, perhaps one time a month, could each one of us, whether we're selected or not, just to choose to go there first. Once that fills and they say, "Actually, this room is now full, then come into here." Another thing you can help with in this service is, I know everyone loves the outside of the row, because the outside of the row represents freedom.

It's freedom. I can leave when I want to leave, but the most comfortable seats we place right in the middle of the sections, not really either, but we would love for you perhaps to help everybody by scooting in. The second thing is parking. Some of you know at this hour if you came, it's really full and there's not enough parking. And we're looking at a lot of options, but one of those options is for us to have less cars here. And so, could you carpool? If you're a family that right now you have more than one vehicle here, and sometimes that's necessary, is it possible? Let me just ask you, is it possible for you to have just one less vehicle than you brought? Okay, just little confession. So the Frost family is a problem around here when it comes to parking, okay? We're all adults and we all have a vehicle, and we all come at different times.

And so, even for us, we're like, we need to bring less vehicles. And so, think about parking. And then third was kids. At the 9:30 hour, not this hour, but the 9:30 hour, we have so many kids that first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grade, all of those rooms are so full that we need to multiply and have two rooms for every grade. That means we need 20 teachers, 20 leaders who have seen the glory of Christ and are willing to extend that to the next generation. So would you consider that? If God calls you to go, I want to tell you and remind you our strategy so that you're not surprised. Our strategy is to imitate what we believe is a healthy parenting process in life that moves towards autonomy. And so, when a little baby comes and they're an infant, the parents have full authority, protection and provision, they become kids.

They're a little bit more access to making their own choices. And so, what happens is parents wisely extend the boundaries, extend independence as they're making choices, and then reinforcing the family DNA up until the point to where you continue to expand to where they're adults, and you recognize autonomy. And because there is such a sweet relationship, our hope is that the parent and the child would want to partner together in life, not just as parent and child, but as friend and partner in Christ, to live life as friends and partners. So it is with this church, when it starts, it's an infant. And what that means is it's not going to have the full array of ministries, because it's still going to be a part of Providence. And so, summer camp VBS, men's Bible studies, women's Bible studies will be done here. And so, it'll be tied together.

Sometimes when you hear video sermon, you think, "Oh, they just want to multi-site." At first there will be some of the sermons that we preach here that will be broadcast there, so that they have enough time to build a trellis, so that the vine of the church has space to grow, meaning building leaders, and systems, and structures, and ministries. But over time, that is going to move. And so, the plan is not for it to be a multi-site that stays a multi-site, but that it starts with an infancy and it moves towards autonomy. I say that, because I don't want anyone to be surprised if you show up there on Easter Sunday, and I am preaching from a screen that you don't feel duped, okay? The plan is that over a period of time, and a short period of time, is that more and more would be done there live.

And so, I would urge you to pray about these things and you would help us to willingly extend ourself to the point of discomfort to help others to become followers of Christ. So let's pray. Father in heaven, we bow before you and ask God for your blessing on all of these things. We need your help. Would you direct each one of us, incline our hearts? Our yes is before you. And now I pray that you would speak through weakness and you would teach us how we can welcome one another in such a way around here, that instead of splintering into different factions and divisions, that we are able to stick together in order to be on this mission of telling other people and speaking with one voice about Jesus Christ. And so help us, I pray in Christ's name, amen. If you have a Bible, if you would turn with me to Romans chapter 14, Romans chapter 14.

And as we move through the next part of a series called Better Together. What we've been looking at in recent weeks is that God created each one of us in his image as relational beings and placed us into community. That each one of us have all sinned against God, and when we sin against God, we feel shame. And when we feel shame, we instinctively want to hide and isolate from other people, which causes loneliness. Then we've looked each week at how Christ came to the earth, our rescuer and savior, and he lived without sin, and yet he came to the earth and he died for our sin. He rose from the dead and he says, "Everyone who trusted me, I'll forgive you of your sin and I will take away your shame, in order that you would be able to live in relationship once again with God Almighty and with each other."

And then we've looked each week, some of his instructions, that restoration is possible if we'll yield to his instructions. See 59 times in the New Testament, God tells us as his people, "This is how you to live in relationship with one another, forgiving one another, honoring one another, praying for one another, caring for one another." And many times we struggle to do that. You see like the fly in this picture in the soup, it doesn't take much to spoil a good thing. The fly is only touching just a fraction of a soup, but most of us aren't going to eat around the fly, are we? Once the fly gets in there, we determine the entire bowl ruined.

And so it is with something that Paul wants to talk about in Romans 14. You see, in Romans 14, the soup that he's talking about is unity, our unity with one another. Psalm 1:33 says how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity. And the fly in Romans 14 is our careless use of our freedom in Christ that divides us into proud factions, creating greater loneliness. Churches have been divided up by many things. Should the pastor wear a tie? Can we drink alcohol? What do you think about the vaccine? Public, private, or homeschool? Do you celebrate that holiday, and who are you going to vote for?

Churches can take these kinds of issues, just a representative sampling, and we can split, and divide, and splinter into all kinds of different groups and factions, forcing us to not think about why we're here, the most important things about life. And so for 11 chapters in the book of Romans, Paul has written about the mercy of Christ. He wants us to feel the mercy of Christ, to see the mercy of Christ. The wrath was directed at us because of our sin, but instead Christ stood in between us and that wrath, and he absorbed all of it. And as a result for those who put their trust in him, he says that there is now no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ. He wants us to feel this mercy and see this mercy, because when he gets to chapter 12, he says, "In light of this mercy, how then should we live?"

And so for chapters 12 through 16, it's simply this is how people who have been overwhelmed by mercy and have put their trust in Christ will live the rest of their life. And when we get to chapter 14, what he wants to talk about is the importance of welcoming one another in an age of division. So it is long and we're going to read all of it.

Verse one of chapter 14, "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike."

"Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. But none of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself. Or if we live, we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end, Christ died and lived again that he might be Lord, both of the dead and of the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother?"

Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, for it is written, 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

"Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble the faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."

"For Christ did not please himself, But as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.' For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through the endurance

and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

So I want to encourage you to consider a few things. Think about a few things this morning with me and then maybe this week. First is that Christ’s mercy compels us to develop convictions. Sometimes when you hear that when people have strong convictions, it creates the ground necessary to divide over those convictions. And what I want to show you here is that it is Christ’s mercy that does not invite you to live on top of the fence, but that you would be fully persuaded before the Lord, how you should live your life and make your decisions. The mercy of Christ compels us to do this. You see, there are two kinds of issues that we face in life, and I like to put them like in hands, because it’s easy for me to think about. There are closed hand issues and there are open hand issues.

Closed hand issues are issues that are clearly specified in scripture. They are clearly commanded or forbidden in scripture. And so, for a believer or two believers to meet together, have a heart that looks to the Lord, has a Bible that is opened, you read one of these things that he specifically commands, that are not debatable. At least they’re not supposed to be. We’re supposed to be in agreement with God and with each other, because that is what he has said. That is clear. But then, so let me show you what I mean, right? Should we rob a bank? That’s an option. That’s an issue. We could rob a bank on Monday. Should we? Well, the Bible says, “Thou shall not steal,” not debatable anymore.

How many ways to heaven? Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.” It’s not debatable. And so, if you have an open Bible, it’s not debatable. These are closed hand issues. But then there’s open hand issues. And open hand issues are issues that are not specified, but they are informed by the rest of scripture, and therefore Christians do debate them. There’s no verse in the Bible that says, “Thou shalt get the vaccine.”

And yet there are all kinds of things in the scripture, that if you understand the breadth of scripture and the character of God, and how he responds to people, it informs your decision as to what you do, whether it’s that, or who should I vote for, or this, or this, or this, right? But because there’s not a verse that you can look at and say, “See, this is what it says,” there’s many things where that people debate.

Romans 14 is about open hand issues, not closed hand issues, okay? It’s about open hand issues. You see many in the early church here in Rome, they were saved out of one or two backgrounds. Many of them were saved, they were gentiles that were saved out of paganism. And one of the features of their religion, their idolatry, was that they would sacrifice meat to the idol and then they would serve it to others. They would sell it at the market. In this idolatrous society, they believed that there was such thing as good and evil, like spirits. And so, one of the things that they thought, in Greek thought, was that perhaps evil would enter the body when it was ingested with food, and when we would eat food.

And so, they started saying, “You know what? We need a means by which we can cleanse the food before we eat it.” So they said, “We know we have all these Gods. We have a God of the river and the God of the sea. We have the God of the clouds. We have a God of this and this and this. We’ll just put the meat in front of these idols and the idols will cleanse them, and then we’ll sell the meat at the market, and it will be clean meat.”

And because it was clean meat, it was chosen for special occasions like parties and funerals, and weddings, funerals too perhaps. Yeah. And so, enter the early church. You have people who were saved out of this environment. There were some people within the church and they were saying, “Okay, here’s the deal.” I go to a wedding and they’re like, “Wait a minute. Here’s meat that was offered up to an idol, sacrificed to an idol. Should I eat it or not?”

Well, some of these people who have come out of this lifestyle, out of this faith system, they started looking and said, “There’s no way that I could ever eat this meat, because it’s too closely associated with where I was in all of that idolatry, and I’m not going to eat it, and I’m going to judge everyone who does.”

But then there were others, other believers that said, “Wait a minute, there is one true Lord. There’s only one true Lord. The fact that somebody would place a stake in front of a piece of stone that was carved into a statue, it doesn’t do anything to the meat. And so, stop being so weak.”

Other people, they didn’t come out of paganism, they came out of Judaism with all of its special holy days or holidays, festivals, and feast, and special moments. You’re supposed to stop in order to worship the Lord in a particular way. People came to faith in Christ and they said, “All right, what should we do?”

And some of them said, “Faith in Christ, and we have to keep all of the holy days, all of the rites and festivals and whatnot.”

And others said, “No, wait a minute, Christ fulfilled all of those festivals.”

So what should we do? And his instruction comes. And clearly in verse five, he says, “One person esteems one day is better than another, meaning a holy day. While another esteems all days alike, each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.” No waffling, don’t sit on the fence. It is not the most unifying thing to be thoughtless.

He’s not inviting us to form a conviction. He is commanding us to form a conviction. Now, why would he do that? Because he tells us in verse 23, this, “Whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”

So this is how God designed the world is that he gave us a book and he says, “This is who I am, who you are and how to live in my world.”

When we open up the Bible and we read it, and we respond by saying, “I believe this is true, I’m going to live though this is true.” God calls that faith. It’s where we hear his word and respond in obedience, even though we do not see the benefits, what’s going to come if we do respond that way? But we believe God’s good heart



in commanding that. He calls that faith.

So you notice as we read, he kept saying, “Unto the Lord, if we live, we live unto the Lord. If we die, we die unto the Lord.”

And the point of that is this, is that the entire life for us that are created in the image of God living in his world, life is supposed to be lived by us looking at our situation, and then looking Godward. God, what would you have me do here? And what would you have me do here? And what would you have me do here? So we’re constantly looking at his word, looking at his character and saying, “I want my entire life, all of my decisions, the central fundamental force behind the most influential thing in my life when I’m making my decisions is, what does the Lord say about this?”

And when we do, we live by faith and when we don’t, we’re simply thoughtless, or we’re simply taking the conclusions or convictions that our mom gave us, that may not have come from the Bible. Or that our culture gives us. He says, “It’s not faith.” And as a result of that, he says this, “To sit on the fence and not have a conviction about something in life,” he says, “it’s sin.”

To eat, or drink, or do whatever it is that you do, and not have an assurance that, you know what? I’ve tried to look to the Lord. In a few months, we’re going to vote. At least, most of us are going to vote. I encourage you to do so. You walk out of there and you have done that without consulting his instructions about life. I believe it’s sin, because he says, “Whatever doesn’t happen by faith is sin.”

Our whole life is anchored to him. And so, let me give you this encouragement, instruction. Let’s dive into God’s word to form our convictions. One day we will all stand before God almighty and give an account for our convictions, and I encourage you to prepare for that day. I want you to know on that day, flimsy convictions, they’ll be insufficient. Cultural convictions will be insufficient, inherited convictions from your family of origin or whatever. “Well, so-and-so said so.” They will all be insufficient. Whatever comes from the word of God will be sufficient. So dig into scripture, seek counsel.

This is why life groups are such an important thing, our small group to have other believers. You get into a situation, you’re like, “I’m not sure what to do.” Bring it up. Do any of you know passages in the Bible that might help me to honor the Lord and seek the Lord’s favor, to seek his instruction when it comes to this situation in life? Encourage you to learn the will and the ways of God.

These are two different things, and yet they’re very, very important. So important. The will of God is his instruction. It’s direct. He says, “Do this.” That’s his will. His ways is what he’s like.

And so, let me explain the difference a little differently through my family. Let’s just say that I’m at home with my boys when they were younger, and I gave instruction, and that I wasn’t there anymore, and they forgot, or perhaps one of them got a little distracted. One of them said, “You know what? Dad told us to do this. That’s dad’s will.”

But what if dad didn't say anything about what they're looking to decide? What if they're in the garage and they want to do something wild? They're like, "Man, let's get out the blowtorch. That'd be fun."

Perhaps I've never offered any instruction about that. The ways of God, it's sort of like the ways of me, is this. What would God say if he was here? What would dad say if he was here? What's he like? When you open up the Bible, you're going to read all kinds of stories that don't relate to your situation, but what you're going to find is, you're going to find all kinds of ways and it's going to reinforce your understanding more, and more, and more as you do so, of who God is, what's he like? How does it respond to different situations? And so, let me encourage you to form your convictions on the basis of the word of God.

Second, it's just so critical, is that Christ's mercy allows him to be honored among different convictions. This is so important that you listen carefully right here, because otherwise this is going to be bad. So Christ's mercy allows him to be honored among different convictions. In closed hand issues, this is not true. In closed hand issues, he is only honored when we yield to him. When he says, "I'm the way, the truth and life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

He is not honored by people who say there are many ways, but in open hand issues that's different. And let me show you verse six, "The one who observes the day observes it in honor of the Lord. And the one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God."

This is hard, because for each one of us, if you actually take the time to say, "Okay, God, I'm coming to you. I'm looking for your instruction. I want to know what your will is. I'm leaning into you. I want to know how to honor you."

And you go, and you go through the effort of reading the Bible, and asking other people, and suddenly you form a conclusion with an open hand issue where you're like, "I believe this is how I'm to honor the Lord." It is really difficult to hear someone else do all the same thing and arrive at a different conclusion. And imagine that they're honoring the Lord just as you're honoring the Lord. But notice what's happening here. You have people with the issue of eating this meat, and they decide differently. One chooses to eat, one chooses to abstain, and they're both doing it in honor of the Lord.

What that means is they're both conscious of God. They're both facing Godward. They're both responding to him and trying to lean to say, "My faith is in him. And with the information that I know at this stage of my life, this is why I believe he would have have me..." And then, notice they're both giving thanks to him. One is giving thanks for the freedom to be able to enjoy it, and the other is giving thanks for the protection that God is providing in his caution.

They're both honoring the Lord. And so, he asked the question, "Well, why in the world would Paul call one of them weak?"

And he does. We read in verse one of chapter 14, "As for the one who is weak in faith."

Verse two, “One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.”

Chapter 15, verse one, “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak.”

Why does he call him weak? And I think there’s one reason more than another. Perhaps it’s simply to show our human tendency to assign weakness to anyone who thinks differently than us. More likely because there’s a parallel chapter in one Corinthians eight to what you find here in Romans 14, is he knows that our weak knowledge can actually rob us of freedom that we have in Christ. And so, in one Corinthians eight, he says, “We know an idol has no real existence,” which means he’s saying it’s just a piece of stone, and that there is no God but one.

And he says, “However, not all possess this knowledge, but some through former association with idols they’re past. Now today they eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled.”

But notice what he does next. What he does next is he protects people that would be put into a category of weak. He says verse four, “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls, and he will be upheld for the Lord is able to make him stand.” In other words, why don’t you just let God be God?

He’s not your servant. He’s the Lord’s servant. And the Lord is going to help him stand, and the Lord is going to change his convictions over time as he continues to look to him. The Lord is going to shape his life as each one of us look Godward. And so, let me encourage us here to humbly hold our convictions. Let me encourage you to humbly hold your convictions. By humbly I don’t mean strength of conviction. It is not humble to simply be too lazy to think about something. It is not humble, to not hold to the truth because you don’t want to draw a line. It’s not humble.

Humility begins by saying, “You are God, I’m not. What would you say?” That’s the starting point of humility. So I don’t mean strength of conviction, I mean attitude of response to people who might see things differently than we do now. Now, why should we be humble? Well, first of all, we’re not the judge. We’re not the judge.

Verse 10 says, “Why do you pass judgment on another? We will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”

Second, what we’ve already seen is, why humble? It’s because we can still honor God. People can still honor God by faith and what they know even as they grow. Then there’s another reason we should be humble, and that is because time may prove that we are the weak. I mean, have you ever changed your mind?

Have you ever learned more than you knew before? And as a result of that, your conviction changed? Well, if you actually apply these principles to it, whatever that person was, let’s just say 10 years ago you knew the Lord and you said, “This is how I’m going to think when it comes to politics, or vaccines, or holidays, or whatever it is, drinking or whatever,” right?

Have you changed in any way since that moment? If you have, what it means is that you’ve grown in strength and that person that you used to be, you were weak. And there’s a good chance that you’re not done growing

and learning, which means that for all of us, 10 years from now, we're going to look at the person we are today and go, "That person was weak in comparison to who I now am." And so let's hold our convictions humbly.

Third, Christ's mercy tells us to limit our freedom for love. You see, when Christ saves us, he brings us into his family. This is so important. You see this, you're not an island. None of us are just wild horses. They just get to run wild and say, "I have knowledge. I have Christian freedom. I'll do what I want."

We're horses that are hitched together in a family called the church. We affect one another when we run. This is why verse 15, verses two and three says, "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ to not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."

What that means is, is there anyone who deserved to live in the freedom of their knowledge and power, who they are? It was Jesus. He could have come and lived anywhere, and any way that he wanted to live. And yet instead of pleasing himself, he chose to please us. So much so that he says that the reproaches that should be deservedly placed upon each one of us for our moral guilt, he stands in between and he takes those reproaches upon himself. Not for his own pleasure in the moment, but in order to please us, in order to bring good to us.

And so, in these decisions, when we live in a relationship, we form convictions and we understand that, okay, we have to be humble with these convictions. We need a gas pedal and we need a brake pedal. And the gas pedal is knowledge, and the brake pedal is love. Notice what he says in verse 13. "Decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother." And then he says, "Look, I know." He's got knowledge. "I know and I'm persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself."

Which means what he's saying is this, you put a stake in front of a piece of stone, and that's all it is. It's a stake in front of a piece of stone. He has knowledge. He can use that knowledge and he can just run roughshod over everyone if he wants to. And many of us do this. I have freedom to drink, gas pedal, watch out.

I have freedom to have an opinion about music style. I have freedom to have an opinion about vaccine. I have freedom to have opinion of who I'm going to vote for. And suddenly what happens is, we just slam the gas pedal, because we have freedom in Christ, but you are connected to other people. And so, there's a break. Now, what's the break? Verse 14 and 15. "But it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died."

Love. It is love that recognizes that we live in community and therefore it's more important to help each one of us get to the finish line than it is for us to do what we want to do, and know we have the freedom to do so.

Let me encourage us to distinguish ourselves by our love, to distinguish ourselves by our love. Jesus said, "By this, all people will know that you are my followers, my disciples. If you love one another, love builds up. It cares. It serves. It considers others. It yields, it adjusts our own speed to be considerate of others."

And finally, Christ's mercy inspires us to welcome one another. This is a very short point, but it's the first and the last thing that he says. It's the book ends for everything that we read this morning in chapter 14 verse one, notice what it says. "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him."

And then notice what it says in chapter 15, verse seven. He says, "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

Typically, we speak of the word welcome, is what we do to people who are new. Welcome. We're glad you're here. We have a welcome table for everybody who is new and needs information. We like to welcome people at the doors. And that's now we typically think of the word welcome, but did you notice that in the primary context of what's happening in Romans 14 has nothing to do with front doors, that has everything to do with life groups and living rooms. Where we're living life in community with one another, and suddenly we find that someone else has a different opinion about something that is a open hand issue, and we would just assume them not come anymore, because it's so irritating to have to constantly go back to knowing that you voted for that guy.

And so, what does he say? He says, "Welcome one another as Christ welcomed us." What is that? It's open armed. It's ready for rejection. It's prepared to be patient. Have you ever thought that when Christ welcomed you, he knew how patient he would have to be to endure with you and with me? And he says, "Welcome one another as he's welcome to you."

What does that mean? When we engage with people, I am preparing myself for a lifetime of patience to be in relationship with these people. And so, let me close with an appeal for those who have never put their trust in Christ. Some of you, you're looking for answers to life. You're looking for contentment. You're looking for joy. You're looking for all manner of help in life when it comes to your soul, rest. And let me tell you where it's not going to be found. It's not going to be found at church.

The church is not the entry point to heaven. The church is not the entry point to eternal life. The church is not the entry point to joy, peace, and contentment. It is only Jesus Christ. The church did not die for you. The church did not rise from the dead in order to give you eternal life, but Christ did. Christ is the entry point. He came to the earth. He lived without sin. He went to the cross. He paid our penalty. He was buried in a grave. He rose from the dead. He extended an invitation. If you believe in me and stop trusting in your righteousness, then I will forgive you of your sin. I will bring you into my family.

And this is where the church then picks up. Not as the entry point into heaven. It is the vehicle, the help, the assistance that between now and the day when we get to heaven, it is these people who get to help me get there. To encourage me along the journey, to pray for me along the journey, to welcome me when I'm a little weak in my understanding about what truth is. It is Jesus Christ. And so my question is, have you placed your faith in Christ?

And if you have, and I urge you this week to share that grace that you have received. So let's pray. Father

in heaven, we bow before you and we recognize, God, that the great desire of our heart as we read in this passage, is that we would enjoy such harmony with one another, and such alignment and accord with you, or that we would be able to together speak with one voice to be able to glorify Jesus Christ. I pray God, that you would keep us together as a church. Would you help us to see the difference between our preferences and your instructions? Would you guard our hearts from pride? Would you guard us from moralizing our preferences into loss? And God, would you help us to live together in harmony, welcoming one another as you have welcomed us? We need your help in all of these ways, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



© 2022 Providence Church (Raleigh, NC)

Sermon transcripts may be used for preaching and teaching purposes, but may not be published or sold. While generally accurate, parts of this transcript may contain errors.

Providence reserves the right to correct and/or remove a transcript at any time.