GOD'S GLORIOUS GOSPEL
Romans, chapters 14-15
The Gospel: Transformed Relationships—Welcome One Another
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I | CONTEXT AND CONNECTIONS

1 / When we come to **ch 14 of Romans**, we'll find that Paul is continuing his previous case studies and examples of our Gospel transformed relationships. If you review our last lesson, we surveyed several cases leading up to **ch 14**. So, when Paul begins this next paragraph with **"As for the one who is weak faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions...,"** he is now continuing on with another relationship. So, we'll receive his instruction concerning these now—and how we should respond and relate to them in our own contexts and experiences. And, as we shall see, there are all kinds of parallels between the saints in Rome and us...

2 / And, I have titled this lesson **"Gospel transformed relationships—Welcome One Another"** because that imperative relational verb **'welcome'** is a common verb Paul will use four times, and all four uses will be in the same relational context. Here are the four times Paul uses **'welcome': ch 14.1 & 3; ch 15.7.** So, what does **welcome** mean? It means simply ***to receive, accept, or bring to oneself.*** So, whatever relationships are under consideration here, ***we are to receive, embrace, and welcome one another to ourselves.*** And, in all these cases, as we shall see, those who are receiving and welcoming one another have different **opinions** about issues, practices, and matters. But we are not to allow these personal differences among ourselves divide us from one another—rather, we are to **welcome one another** into our personal and church fellowship and unity.

II | ch 14.1-12 | Welcome one another—not reject one another

1 / Paul states his primary imperative and the occasions that will require the command here in this opening line...and everything that follows here will be examples when and how we need to practice **welcoming one another: "As for the one who is weak in [the] faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions."** This is a 'test of fellowship' that has plagued every generation of Christians and churches in every cultural context—including us. So, we need to define the terms Paul uses here and apply them to ourselves...

2 / ***What does it mean to be 'weak in [the] faith'?*** I have added the definite article 'the' here because the original text has the definite article. Those who are **weak in the faith** don't have **weakness** of faith. That is, they are true believers. They have been **justified by faith** as Paul has defined the Gospel. They are true believers in Jesus Christ. But **the faith** they are **weak in** is just how free and liberated they are to live a life that **God welcomes.** They are still **weak** because they still believe that there are certain practices or exercises that they need to live by in order to please God. NOT to earn their salvation, but rather to live a well-pleasing life before God as saved saints. Paul will isolate and itemize a few of them in their fellowship here in Rome as the passage unfolds. So, when we begin to list them as Paul does, just remember that their commitment and adherence to these practices is what makes them **weak in the faith.**

3 / Incidentally, Paul will introduce the word **strong** when we get to **ch 15.1.** He doesn't use **strong** here in **ch 14,** but he is addressing those who are **strong in the faith** when he commands them to **welcome the one who is weak in the faith.**

4 / Then, what does Paul mean by **opinions,** as in **'not to quarrel over opinions'?** *[Just as a heads-up here, it has been common to call these issues 'doubtful things,' or 'disputable matters.']* Again, as we develop these two chapters, especially ch 14, we will discover that these **opinions** are those issues of conduct among Christians that are matters of **personal preference, opinion, or conscience.** That is, these issues are neither 'right' nor 'wrong' Scripturally. There is no Scripture that either commands it to be done that way, nor is there Scripture that condemns it. They are **personal preferences or opinions.** Here is where we often err in our churches and fellowships: we may prefer a particular practice, style, or tradition—and it may even be a conviction of our conscience—but when we elevate that **opinion** to the status of orthodoxy that applies to everyone else, and **quarrel over those opinions,** and **reject** and **refuse**

to welcome everyone who doesn't practice it like we do, then we have violated this primary rule of transformed relationships.

5 / So then, Paul begins to itemize these issues that he knows are separating them from one another in their church relationships and fellowship. He will list them even as he applies the **welcoming** attitudes and responses they should have toward one another, even as they allow themselves to maintain their differences in practicing them. Here they are: [1] ***eating anything vs. eating only vegetables, 14.2;*** [2] ***observing certain days as better than others vs. esteeming all days alike, 14.5;*** [3] ***abstaining from eating 'unclean' foods (think Jewish law foods) vs. eating all foods regardless of Jewish traditional prohibitions, 14.14-15;*** [4] ***drinking wine vs. tee-total abstinence, 14.21.***

6 / And, as I have said, this practice of rejecting and dis-fellowshipping those who disagree with you over these tertiary and peripheral issues are not just a Romans problem—all of us have our own *doubtful things* or *disputable matters* that guide our preferences, conduct, and lifestyles. We all have our preferable styles of music and hymnody, styles of dress, or codes of personal conduct. Just from my own personal experience, I grew up in a church fellowship that wouldn't even think of having a guitar accompaniment in a worship service because guitars were played by the 'holy-rollers' and in honey-tonks. In my own experiences of pastoral and church fellowships, we were criticized in the church I pastored [by other churches and pastors] because we started using cassette instrumental accompaniment—because the recorded instrumentalists may not be in total doctrinal agreement with us [until those who criticized us deemed it acceptable, then it was OK]. Then, if you used a recorded accompaniment track, it couldn't have drums—because drums were sensual and demonic. I grew up in a fellowship of churches where a Christmas tree was considered taboo—because it had pagan and idolatrous origins. And everyone of you can cite your own examples from your experiences. So, those are the kinds of *doubtful things* or *disputable matters* Paul means. The saints in Rome had theirs—and we have ours ... you can think of many others...

7 / So that brings us then to the *corrective attitudes and conduct we must practice among ourselves*—along with the Gospel reasons why we must do so:

[1] **Welcome one another**. This is the primary Gospel relationship command we must obey. And why must we **welcome one another?** Because **God has welcomed him! [14.3].** These fellow saints who believe, prefer, and live differently than you do **are just as welcomed by God as you are!**

[2] **Do not pass judgment on God's fellow-servant [14.4].** To **pass judgment** here means ***to reject.*** We don't want to be rejecting a brother or sister whom God has **welcomed!** Paul comes back to this truth of *setting ourselves up as a fellow-believer's final judge* over and over: **vv 3, 4, 10, 13.**

[3] **Be fully convinced of your personal convictions of conscience in your own mind [14.5].** This will be repeated again in **14.22-23.**

[4] **Do whatever you do as an act of worship [see ch 12.1-2], as honorable obedience to God, and all for God's glory, 14.6.** And this is because both you and the brother/sister who believes and conducts himself with different preferences than you do—**you both belong to Christ and live under His Lordship, 14.7-9.** What Paul is describing here is **the Gospel by which we all are saved!**

III | ch 14.13-23 | However, our conscience does not permit us to 'put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother'

1 / So, here's what they were doing among themselves and against each other. The ones who had the stronger conscience [that is, they knew that they had the liberty in Christ to practice certain things that the weaker brothers and sisters thought were not permissible] were flaunting their liberty in the presence of the weaker saints. Not only was this un-loving **[see v 3, "despise"]** and divisive to the unity of the church body, but, in so doing, they were also encouraging the weaker ones to violate their more sensitive consciences. When they did this, Paul warns that we **put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.** In other words, we enable the weaker brother to commit an act that he/she believes in their own conscience to be sin—not right and pleasing to God. Paul uses strong words here: **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, v 15. ... Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God, v 20.**

2 / Paul uses himself as an example in **v 14: I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean.** Paul had a 'strong' conscience. He knew that Christ had fulfilled all the Levitical dietary laws, restrictions, and prohibitions. BUT, if a brother with a weaker conscience thought he should still abide by them **in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God [v 6],** then he would forego that liberty when he was in their presence so as to not encourage them to violate their 'weaker' more sensitive conscience. **V 20: 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.** Both the stronger and the weaker saints should follow their conscience practices in the ways they think are most pleasing to Christ. BUT, when the stronger brother flaunts his liberated conscience in the face of the weaker brother, then his **accepted practice** becomes **unacceptable** to the spirit of love, unity, and mutual upbuilding. **Vv 16-17: 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.** So that when we are willing to forego what we believe to be something that is personally acceptable for us for the sake of not unnecessarily offending the weaker brother, then we are most pleasing to the Spirit of Christ. **Vv 18-19: 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. ... It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble, v 21.**

IV | ch 15.1-7 | Christ Himself is the Supreme, Preeminent Model for our loving attitudes and relationships toward and with one another

1 / So, Paul reiterates and sums up everything he has drawn out in **ch 14** in specific examples. **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 [Psalm 69.9], "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."** This again is the truth of the Gospel being worked out in our conduct in all our relationships with one another. We can think especially of **Philippians 2.1-11** here. No one had any more 'liberty' to exercise His own prerogatives and preferences than Christ. But He was willing to forego, surrender, and sacrifice His own inherent privileges as God to humble Himself, give up His 'rights,' and serve us in our weaknesses **[ch 5.6-8].** AND, this is also the over-arching **brotherly love and showing honor to one another** that Paul has already commanded us in **ch 12.9-10.**
2 / And since this is a quotation from the Old Testament, Paul uses this OT reference to remind us that the whole OT was written to point to Christ and prepare us to see the unity of the whole Bible. **V 4: For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.** This **hope** that Paul is emphasizing here is the **hope** of the Gospel. It is the **hope** of the coming Kingdom of God, the certain assurance and confident expectation that God has saved us; secured us in Christ; that He has justified us, accepted us, **welcomed us to Himself** in Christ; and that we are destined to be with Him forever **in Glory!** All of the blessings of the Gospel are promised to us and will be fulfilled in us in this **hope! [see vv 4 & 13].** And we enjoy this **hope** through the promises of the Scriptures and by our continued **perseverance and endurance** in obedience to what he has commanded us to practice.
3 / The ways we enjoy our ***transformed relationships*** with one another is through committed, consistent, and continued **worship with one another in the church body. Vv 5-7: May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony** [as I have just instructed], **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.** And with this, Paul 'bookends,' 'brackets,' and gives us an 'inclusio' to the instruction he began in **14.1.** In the verses between, Paul has given us detailed examples, case studies, and Gospel reasons why we should **not despise** one another or think ourselves better and superior to any other brother or sister because of our different preferences or convictions of personal conscience. ***We must be sure that we don't give any brother or sister any less of a 'welcome' than God has given them—or us!***

V | ch 15.8-13 | The Old Testament is replete with prophecies and promises that Christ will call and include the Gentiles in His Gospel covenant promises

1 / We have seen all along here in Romans that many of the conflicts and tensions that had arisen in the fellowship of the saints in Rome stemmed from their divergent cultural legacies, backgrounds, and traditions as Jews and Gentiles. Indeed, this was true not only in Rome, but all over the first-century Christian world as the Gospel went out to the Gentiles. And so, Paul quotes at least four prominent OT prophecies to demonstrate that it was God's covenant purpose and plan all along to call, save, and include Gentiles in His covenant people, the New Covenant spiritual Israel in Christ.
2 / Yes! Christ had come from Jewish stock, a Jewish family tree, as Paul asserted in his opening Gospel introduction in **ch 1.1-3.** These Gospel covenant promises were **given to the patriarchs [all of them, but particularly Abraham and David].** And Christ came as **a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.** And what was that promise? **And in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy!** He has just commanded the Jewish and Gentile members of the church body to **welcome one another** in mutual honor and worship and **glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [v 6].** And he has reiterated over and over how the **mercy** of God has been extended and granted to the Gentiles by including them in equal status and standing in the New Israel of God **[see especially ch 11.30-32].**
3 / So now, Paul quotes from **Psalm 18.49 / 2 Samuel 22.50; Deuteronomy 32.43; Psalm 117.1; Isaiah 11.10—**and all to show that God is only doing, even here right among them, what He has been promising He would do from the beginning of their history as God's covenant nation and people.
4 / And again, Paul returns to the prayer and benediction he has already pressed on them in **ch 15.5-7** to once again pray and bless them in mutual love, unity, and worship: **May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.** This is what we **hope** and pray for us as well. But we will experience and enjoy these promised blessings upon and among ourselves as we **believe** what God has promised and provided—and as we conduct all our *transformed relationships* as we have been instructed.

VI | ch 15.14-33 | Paul's ministry passion: to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, including the saints in Rome

This section will conclude Paul's Gospel instruction of this book/letter **[see v 33].** In it, he includes several exhortations and encouragements:

v 14: He commends and encourages the Romans to put into practice the instructions he has written...

vv 15-21: He reiterates the apostolic call he has received from God **in Christ Jesus** to preach this glorious Gospel he has been proclaiming and writing about—and a brief summary of his ministry agenda up to this time to preach the Gospel **from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum,** which was just across the Adriatic Sea to the east of Italy. And **Christ had accomplished it through him—by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God...**

vv 22-29: He has longed for many years to come to them in Rome, but had been hindered because he had been proclaiming the Gospel **where Christ had not already been named,** quoting from **Isaiah 52.15.** But now that they have heard, he wants to come to Rome **[see ch 1.8-15]...** BUT NOW, **I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while [vv 24, 28].** ALSO, he is collecting relief aid to take to the saints in Jerusalem, and hopes to leave from there to come to Rome after he fulfills this mission.

vv 30-33: He appeals to the saints in Rome to please pray for him on this mission to Jerusalem, **that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.**

MAY THE GOD OF PEACE BE WITH YOU ALL!