

More Important than Being Right
Romans 14:13-15:13
9-27-2026

The words of an old hymn say,

**The ground is level at the foot of the cross.
Anyone may come there for there is no cost.
Rich man, poor man, bonded or free
The ground was leveled that day at Calvary.**

In our increasingly fractured and broken world something vital yet too often ignored even in the church is that we may come from different backgrounds and experiences, but in Christ we all stand on equal footing before God, united through a common faith.

But sin and human nature being the way they are, it doesn't take long for some to try and make the ground at the foot of the cross uneven again

Blind to their prejudices and self-righteousness, they instead start labelling and judging those who may not do or see things the same as they do often condemning the sins of others while ignoring their own

In their pride they make the ground uneven before the cross based on what Paul had referred to in Romans 14:1 as disputable matters. Issues of the law rather than grace, works and effort rather than love and compassion

So, he had said stop judging one another over such things, giving 2 examples which had become such a source of division and friction in the church

Some had previously worshipped and made sacrifices at the various temples. They knew that almost all the meat sold in the marketplace had come from temples and was now being sold to support pagan practices. Would it be a sin, a denial of their faith and their Lord, to eat such meat? Some said yes and some said no, it's just meat. Who was right?

Others had been raised on the law of Moses which specified special holy days and commanded the Sabbath be kept holy by doing no work on it. But so many were coming to faith with no such background and continued to work on the Sabbath and ignored the special holy days. Were they sinning by breaking the law? Some said yes and others said no, you can worship God any day of the week. Who was right?

And each side was pointing fingers and saying I'm right and you're wrong and unless you see things my way, I won't have anything to do with you.

Being right became more important even than the fellowship and unity Jesus died to achieve.

But some things are more important than being right!

Yet as I had mentioned previously, there have been numerous disputable matters like these over the centuries, issues which some elevated to matters of faith and tests of fellowship which have been allowed to divide and exclude and judge in the body of Christ.

such things as dancing and drinking, smoking and going to the movies, mixed swimming and playing cards, piercings and tattoos at one time or another have all been grounds to judge those who participate.

For others the issues have been things like are women sinning if they wore pants like a man some said Wearing makeup and jewelry were questioned by some because Peter said a women's beauty must not come from such things

and more recently entire churches are being disfellowshipped over what is the acceptable role for women in the church based on a particular interpretation of some of Paul's writings.

Being right becomes more important than the faith we share

What about men whose hair covers their ears, after all 1 Cor 11:14 calls it a disgrace for men to have long hair

Eating food in the church building was an issue for some. They obviously weren't Baptists.

letting children participate in Halloween.

One 17th century Puritan leader referred to wedding rings as diabolical circles for the devil to dance on. In 1653 the Massachusetts Bay Colony legislature even passed a law banning all such superstitious and vain use of rings.

Buying insurance was at one time considered sin because it showed a lack of faith.

It wasn't that long ago that some said playing guitars and drums in worship was sin because they were called instruments of the devil and used in bars and nightclubs.

Of course, they said the same thing in the 1500's when Martin Luther began using organs in the church. Before that it had been used almost exclusively in bars. And to make matters worse he even wrote new words for popular bar tunes and turned them into hymns to be sung in praise of God, the best known being A Mighty Fortress is Our God because as he put it, why should the devil have all the good music.

this was countered in Calvins Geneva where Calvin declared it wasn't right for anything but the Psalms to be sung in worship.

And some groups forbid the use of any musical instrument at all.

And then there were the more philosophical arguments like how many angels can fit on the head of a pin or another from the Middle Ages, did Jesus laugh.

Disputable matters not essential to the faith yet have been allowed to become issues of faith and division and judging others

Divisions like these have led to stories like the one about the man who was shipwrecked on a desert island for many, many years. One day, while he was walking along the beach, he spotted a ship off in the distance. Because it was away from the normal shipping lanes, in all the years he had been on the island he had never seen a ship before. He naturally got really excited about the chance of being rescued.

He immediately gathered up a big pile of wood and built a huge bonfire which generated a lot of smoke and it worked. The ship saw him and was soon headed his way. When they drew close, a lifeboat was lowered to investigate. He was rescued.

After some preliminary conversation, the man in charge asked him how he had managed to survive for so many years. He told about his exploits for food and how he was even able to make a nice house to live in, which he pointed to up on the ridge overlooking the beach. As his rescuers looked, they saw three buildings and asked about the other two. He said that one on the left is my church, I go there to worship every Sunday. What about the other, they asked, he replied that's where I used to go to church

I recently read that there are an estimated 41,000 different denominations in the world today, most started because of disagreements over egos and disputable matters and demanding others see things their way.

It's not diversity and our differences but the fights and divisions that come from them which are the issue

Forgetting that some things are more important than being right.

As we pick up in Romans 14:13, Paul writes,

"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men." (Romans 14:13–15:18)

He's not talking about excusing or ignoring sin but the self-righteousness and judgmental spirit that will divide the body of Christ of lesser matters

When he wrote to the Corinthians, right in the middle of a long section on all our differences and diversity within the body of Christ, Paul said **love is the most excellent way**.

To call it most excellent means it is beyond measure and of surpassing greatness

- I. **So, it shouldn't surprise us that here in Romans Paul says acting in love is more important than being right and insisting on our own way**

He knew what was right, that we are free to eat anything and able to worship on any day
But he also knew that if he pushed it and insisted everyone else therefore had to see and do things as he did, he would do harm to the consciences of those who may still be struggling with what it means to be set free from the law, trying to break free from their past practices and beliefs and old ways of seeing things

And might follow his example with a guilty conscience, worried that they were sinning

Love seeks to make things easier not harder for others
To help set them free to live in newness of life not be weighed down by fear
So, he says rather than judge your brother, make it easier for them by not putting any obstacles or stumbling blocks in their way about disputable matters and secondary issues

For those raised on the Sabbath laws, give them time to break free from their bondage to them
And for those who had worshipped and made sacrifices to pagan gods thinking they were real, give them space for God to work to break them free from those influences

it takes time for new believers to break free from some sins and old ways of thinking and seeing the world
People don't need condemnation, they need edification, support and encouragement to seek and serve Christ

In 1 Cor 8:9 Paul even warns that we must be careful so that our freedom and insisting that others agree or see things our way, does not cause others with weaker consciences to stumble

As he writes in 1 Cor 13, we can have all the knowledge in the world, but without love it means nothing

Verse 16 says do not let what you know is good to be spoken of as evil and the source of your brother's guilty conscience

For as he says here, the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, of secondary issues and disputable matters, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men

we need to be encouraging not judging one another over secondary issues, even if we know we are right

Acting in love is more important than being right

he then goes on to state that

"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 14:19–15:4)

II. Not just love but it's more important to build up and strengthen others than insisting we are right

To make every effort means it is to be something we actively pursue and work towards, not just to talk about but to make it a reality

He then repeats himself, stating it is imperative that each of us should seek to please and strengthen our neighbor for their good in order to build them up just as Jesus did for us!

He who knew no sin, became sin for us

How do our actions and words impact others

Are we always seeking to prove we are right, our views correct, our actions pure or more concerned with coming alongside of others, especially those who may be struggling and simply walk with them. Encouraging and building them up while setting aside our need to be right

Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek their own good, but the good of others. Paul has written in 1 Cor 10:23-24

There would be far less division and arguing if we were more intent on looking out for and building up others rather than just promoting ourselves and our views.

as Paul told the Philippians, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, instead in humility consider others before yourselves. Each of us should not just look out for our own interests, but also the interests of others. Our attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ who gave his own life for us.

Instead of concentrating and dividing over disputable matters, Paul says we are to build up others. Instead of correcting those we disagree with, maybe we need to expend more energy edifying and strengthening them

Rather than worrying about who's right, maybe we need to start paying attention to ways to demonstrate our love, building up rather than tearing down, coming together rather than being pulled apart

So do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, Paul told the Ephesians, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs so that it may benefit those who listen.

This verse literally says, so it will give grace to those who hear you

Love is more important than being right.

Building up others is more important than being right.

III. And thirdly, Paul says Unity is more important than being right

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:5-6)

We must never ignore Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 which he prayed right before his arrest and crucifixion because it expresses so clearly his heart's desire for his people, the church
Central to that prayer was for the unity of his people
He prayed that we may be one just as he and the father are

Unity is central to who God is
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in eternity past, present, and future in perfect unity and fellowship
There is no division between them and that is what he prayed for us, his people.
Diverse, yet united

How we treat, speak to and about one another, says volumes to the world whether our words about God and Jesus are really true, whether we really believe them

Paul even warned the church in Galatia that we must love our neighbors as ourselves. For if we keep on biting and devouring each other, we need to watch out or we will be destroyed by each other

He had begun chapter 14 with the words to accept those whose faith is weak without passing judgement on disputable matters.

We need to be building bridges not walls

Once upon a time there were 2 brothers who lived on adjoining farms and fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in over 40 years of farming side by side, sharing machinery, helping each other when they needed more manpower, sharing goods as needed.

Then something happened, things were said, and it all fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and over time grew into a major disagreement and finally exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox, I'm looking for a few days' work, he said. Perhaps you have some small jobs I can do?

Well, yes, John said, I do have a job for you. Look across that creek at that farm. That's my neighbor, in fact it's my younger brother. Last week there was a meadow between us and he took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may have done that to spite me, but I'll go him one better. See that pile of lumber curing by the barn? I want you to build me a fence, an 8-foot-high fence so that I won't have to see him or his place anymore.

The carpenter said, I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you.

John helped get the carpenter set up then told him he had to go to town for some supplies and would be gone all day.

The carpenter worked hard all day, measuring and sawing and nailing. About sunset, John returned just as he was finishing the job.

When he saw it, the farmer's eyes popped open wide and his jaw dropped. There was no fence at all. Instead, there was a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other. It was a nice piece of workmanship with handrails and everything. And just as he was about to tear into the carpenter for what he had done, he saw his brother walking across it with hands outstretched.

The brothers stood there looking at each other before they both broke down and embraced in the middle of the bridge. As they turned toward the carpenter, he had picked up his toolbox and starting to leave.

No wait, they both shouted. Please stay for a few days, we both have a lot of projects you can do.

But the carpenter smiled and shook his head, saying, I'd love to stay but I have many more bridges to build.

as he concludes this section on not judging others, he says,

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.' Again, it says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.' And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.' And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.' May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:7-13)