

Leader's Guide

LESSON 25

Dr. Jerry Nelson

In response to the sermon on March 9th.

Romans 14-15:13 **Why Can't You Be Like Me?**

Key Points

Our love for God will manifest itself in our love for one another, especially in conflict. As we live, work and worship side by side, there are boundless opportunities for division. As our desires for God increase, as our attitudes and actions change, we will be tempted to look around and say in our heart, "What about them?" If we succumb to the sin of self-righteousness, our critical, judgmental spirit can do a great deal of damage to kingdom work. How do we guard against such error? In this passage Paul addresses:

- Weaker/stronger Christians
- Personal conviction in disputable matters of conduct
- Inner motivations (serving God from the heart)
- Judging others
- True love for one another

We all wrestle with behavioral discrepancies. We are sinful people who are increasing in righteous living, but live in a fallen and sinful world. Therefore, we struggle. How do you respond in a disputable matter? Do you confront the other person? Or do you let them know, through non-verbal communication, that you disapprove? Does your heart burn in anger, resentment or frustration? Do you simply distance yourself from them?

Definitions

"Disputable matters" are matters over which Christians disagree but the disagreements come not from a proper understanding of Scripture but from cultural differences. These matters are not inherently right or wrong.

"Faith" here is not a reference to a person's trust in Christ. Paul is not spelling out a difference between some who are Christians and some who are not - for he calls them all "brothers" in the Lord. The word "faith" here is a reference to a person's convictions.

"Weak" is not "weak" as in easily overtaken or easily overwhelmed by temptation. This is "weak" in the sense that someone has an overly sensitive conscience about certain issues without biblical warrant.

Or do you, like Paul, love in such a way that encourages those who are weaker in the faith? Do you keep a check on your own attitudes, lest you succumb to the temptation of arrogance, pride, or self-righteousness?

As believers, one of the most difficult challenges we face is the temptation to compare ourselves with one another. It is one of the key tactics of the Enemy. The purpose is to destroy relationships, and ultimately, the Church. And it is effective. Our challenge is to truly love one another, to be patient and accepting, to resist becoming the gatekeeper over another's convictions on disputable matters. God alone is Master. True love for one another will be evident by our words, ultimately our worship. For our hearts and voices will be united in praise to God for his mercy and grace to us!

Personal Reflection

- Everyone wrestles with “disputable matters.” Throughout this series your group has probably wrestled with issues that have surfaced disagreements. How did you handle it? Is your group still meeting? Have some dropped out as a result of a disagreement in disputable matters? Were you able to love one another anyway, staying relationally connected, giving leeway for growth?
- Take time in your group to:
 - celebrate what God has done as you have loved one another,
 - address issues that remain unresolved, and
 - talk about the heart response of the application of these verses.
- We encourage you to take extra time praying for those individuals who may struggle with this passage. Pray for the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and restoration.

Discussion Questions

1. Name some disputable matters among Christians that, in your experience, have been frequently argued? (*Discuss real issues here, not simply red herrings.*)
2. Can you describe the feelings you have when these issues are discussed? What are the possible sources of such feelings?
3. How are we to treat those who have a different opinion on a disputable matter?
4. Is there a time and place to attempt to persuade someone on a disputable matter?
5. How do we check our motivations before we speak to someone about a disputable matter?
6. From 14:15 to the end of the section, Paul deals with those who have greater liberty in these matters. What is his instruction to them? What does limiting one's freedom look like in practice between Christians?
7. What does verse 21 mean to you? (*It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.*)
8. What other practical advice does Paul give in 14:22 and how is that applied?
9. What is the principle of 15:2 and how do we apply it?
10. How have you accepted someone who does not fit your standard of acceptable behavior?
11. If your heart is hardened against a fellow believer regarding a disputable matter, what is one way that you can cooperate with the Spirit to love them?