

## Growing in Grace

### Lesson # 8

#### The Grace to Let Others Be

#### Romans 14:1-23

[Taken from The Grace Awakening by Charles Swindoll. (Dallas: Word, 1990)]

#### Introduction

We have spent our time talking about the vertical grace that comes from God to us. Tonight, we will begin talking about the horizontal grace that we should have with each other. God demonstrated His love to us by sending Jesus to die for us by His grace, even when we were still sinners. (Romans 5:8). We can't pay Him back. We didn't deserve it. Paul tells us in Ephesians that we are to treat others the same way God has treated us.

It all really comes down to our attitude. Viktor Frankl, concentration camp survivor, said, *"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: To choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances..."* [Victor Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. As quoted in Swindoll. *The Grace Awakening*. p. 152] Illustration: *"Both the hummingbird and the vulture fly over our nation's deserts. All vultures see is rotting meat, because that is what they look for. They thrive on that diet. But hummingbirds ignore the smelly flesh of dead animals. Instead, they look for the colorful blossoms of desert plants. The vultures live on what was. They live on the past. They fill themselves with what is dead and gone. But hummingbirds live on what is. They seek new life. They fill themselves with freshness and life. Each bird finds what it is looking for. We all do."* [Steve Goodier, Quote Magazine, in Reader's Digest, May, 1990]

But before we proceed we need to establish one thing, we are not talking about "tolerance" as our society currently defines it. "According to Christian author Chuck Colson, what our culture really insists on isn't tolerance but what he calls "forced neutrality," that is, not ever voicing disagreement or objection to anything." For example, when followers of Jesus look at the increasing popularity of Buddhism in American culture, what does genuine tolerance really look like? Daniel Taylor would say it's Christians saying, "Well, we think the main ideas of Buddhism aren't true because they are in conflict with the Christian faith, but we certainly affirm the right of Buddhists to practice their faith freely and without hindrance." But the "forced neutrality" Colson observes simply won't accept that, but instead it insists that Christians say, "Well, you know, Buddhism is just as true and valid way to know God as any other religion is, including the Christian faith." [as quoted by Timothy Peck in a sermon entitled "Ending Christian Intolerance." On Romans 14:1-12. [www. Sermoncentral.com](http://www.Sermoncentral.com)]

We are not talking about anything goes tolerance, the universalism that all roads lead to heaven, you just need to be sincere. What we are talking about are room within the Christian faith for differences of opinion over personal convictions.

## I. TWO STRONG TENDENCIES THAT NULLIFY GRACE

Lets begin by looking at the truth set out in Romans 12:9-17. *“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. (10) Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; (11) not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; (12) rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; (13) distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. (14) Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. (15) Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. (16) Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. (17) Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.”*

This is the epitome of the Christian way of life—the Christian’s attitude! Why can’t we live like this? Because of the following tendencies:

A. The tendency to COMPARE. We prefer sameness, predictability, and common interests. Unfortunately, we base this on externals. Our attitudes prevent us from seeing the big picture. God never intended for all of His children to be the same. God is not up there producing “cookie-cutter,” “paper-doll” Christians! That’s not God’s work—that’s the work of man!

Legalism requires that we all be alike, unified in convictions and uniform in appearance. Grace finds pleasure in diversity, encourages individuality, and leaves room for differences of opinion. Before we will be able to demonstrate the grace to let others be, we have to stop this legalistic tendency to COMPARE.

B. The tendency to CONTROL. This is certainly hard for those who find security in religious rigidity. People who control use manipulation through fear, threats and subtle hints to get their way. These people amount to nothing more than Christian bullies. This kind of control nullifies grace.

[Warning! You will hear truths revealed in Romans 14 that will go against everything in your human nature. Some of you will resist this with every ounce that is within you.]

## II. SOME BIBLICAL GUIDELINES THAT MAGNIFY GRACE

### A. ACCEPT OTHERS (Romans 14:1-4)

*“Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. (2) For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. (3) Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. (4) Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.”*

Guideline #1: *“Accepting others is basic to letting them be.”*

In Romans 14 the apostle Paul is dealing with matters of Christian conscience and personal convictions. The text addresses the problem of differences of opinion in *“doubtful things.”* Obviously some things are essential in the Christian faith. These things are not optional;

such as the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atoning death of Christ and his bodily resurrection. These are non-negotiables. But apart from the fundamentals there are many other things that are not as clear, not as apparent, and not specifically spoken on in the Word of God. In these matters, we must allow for differing opinions between Bible believing Christians on how to best apply a biblical principle. Paul is telling us that in these matters we are to accept people with differing convictions from ours without trying to change their mind.

Today, our issues are NOT centered on whether or not to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols; our issues are: Going to movies, wearing makeup, playing cards, going to live theater, watching certain TV shows, mixed swimming, having a quiet time every day, going to a restaurant that serves alcohol, wearing certain clothes, owning certain cars, living in nice homes, listening to certain music, drinking wine with a meal, dancing, having a certain job, wearing you hair a certain way, having fine and elegant possessions, getting a facelift, drinking coffee, working out in leotards...etc.

*“A man was a youth worker in an ethnic community many years ago. He showed the youth group a missionary film. The film projector hadn’t been off an hour when the church leaders called him in and asked him if he’d showed the film. He said that he had. They said that they didn’t like that. He recalled that they had showed slides at the last missionary conference. They said that if the pictures are still—fine. If they move—sin!” [Quoted by Chuck Swindoll in “The Grace Awakening” pp. 160-161]*

Look at the first part of verse 3, *“Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat.”* The words *“despise him who does”* means *“to regard as nothing, to regard with contempt, to utterly despise, or to discount entirely.”* Now look at the other side, found in the second part of verse 3, *“...and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. “Judging”* here means *“to criticize, to view negatively, to make wrong and damaging assumptions about the persons character.”* Looking at others with contempt is wrong!

What is acceptance then? Gladys M. Hunt wrote, *“It means you are valuable just as you are. It allows you to be the real you. You aren’t forced into someone else’s idea of who you really are. It means your ideas are taken seriously since they reflect you. You can talk about how you feel inside and why you feel that way—and someone really cares.*

*Acceptance means you can try out your ideas without being shot down. You can even express heretical thoughts and discuss them with intelligent questioning. You feel safe. No one will pronounce judgment on you, even though they don’t agree with you. It doesn’t mean you will never be corrected or shown to be wrong; it simply means it is safe to be you and no one will destroy you out of prejudice.” [Gladys M. Hunt, “That’s No Generation Gap!” Eternity Magazine, Oct. 1969, p. 15. as quoted in Swindoll, p. 162]*

Guideline #1: *“Accepting others is basic to letting them be.”*

## B. LET OTHERS DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES (vv. 5-8)

Guideline #2: *"Refusing to dictate to others allows the Lord freedom to direct their lives." "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. (6) He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. (7) For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. (8) For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."*

The later part of verse five seems of special importance, *"Let each be fully convinced in his own mind."* Paul's point seems to be uncomfortably clear. Mind your own business. A Christian's personal convictions are just that personal.

Let me give you an example from my personal life. Some of you know that Debbie and I homeschooled our daughter Nikki for most of her way through school. Yet I have never preached that everyone should home school their children. Why? Because we believed that this was something that God wanted us to do in our family, it was a personal conviction. That did not make us better, or more spiritual than those parents that sent their children to Christian School or to Public School. It was a personal conviction not a universal principle.

Do we want to help others grow to maturity? Let people be different. We have to stop trying to control and manipulate people into our idea of what a Christian is and should be.

Guideline #2: *"Refusing to dictate to others allows the Lord freedom to direct their lives."*

## C. REFUSE TO JUDGE OTHERS (vv. 9-12)

*"For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. (10) But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (11) For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." (12) So then each of us shall give account of himself to God."*

Guideline #3: *"Freeing others means we never assume a position we're not qualified to fill."* Why aren't we qualified to judge? We're not omniscient...so we can't read people's hearts and motives. We're finite...so we can't see the big picture and know the whole story. We're human...so we are imperfect, inconsistent, subjective

*I will never forget what happened to me a few years ago as a group of men from the church made the trip to Boulder, Colorado to attend a Promise Keepers Meeting. As we were checking in to the motel a group of motorcyclist's pull up to the motel. I mean these guys were real biker', decked out in leather, tattoos and the whole bit. I rather snidely commented to one of the fellows in our group, "I bet there here for the Promise Keeper's conference." Well the next day,*

*who do you think rode into the stadium with Charles Swindoll, the key note speaker, yea you guessed the biker's. Sometimes God has a way of rubbing your nose in it. I had judged them and I was wrong.*

Because we are inconsistent, we are not qualified to judge. Of course, if there is a blatant breaking with Scripture, we need to take care of the problem. That's not my subject...you know that! There is a place for discernment. Does this mean we are always to agree? Certainly not! But we should be civil in our conflicts.

Guideline #3: *"Freeing others means we never assume a position we're not qualified to fill."*

D. EXPRESS YOUR LIBERTY WISELY (vv. 13-18)

Guideline #4: *"Loving others requires us to express our liberty wisely." "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.(14) I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. (15) Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. (16) Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; (17) for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (18) For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men*

Love must be the ruling authority in our expression of liberty.

- We are to live in freedom to please God—not others! We shall answer to Christ—not others (v. 10)
- We need to act out our lives and the way we do things because of our love for each other in serving Christ, knowing that we will have to answer to what He says—not what others think and say!

Chuck Swindoll paraphrase of these verse: *"Nothing that is not specifically designated as evil in Scripture is evil, but rather a matter of one's personal preference or taste. So let it be. Even if you personally would not do what another is doing, let it be. And you who feel the freedom to do so, don't flaunt it, or mock those who disagree. We are in the construction business—not destruction. And let's all remember that God's big-picture kingdom plan is not being shaped by small things like what one person prefers over another, but by large things like righteousness and peace and joy." [Swindoll p. 167]*

Enjoy your liberty without flaunting it... Do it wisely, quietly, privately and with those of like mind.

Guideline #4: *"Loving others requires us to express our liberty wisely."*

III. A Few Actions That Signify Grace (vv. 19-23)

"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. (20) Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. (21) It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. (22) Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. (23) But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin."

1. Pursue things that encourage peace and assist other's growth.

Filter whatever you do through this twofold

grid:

(1) Is this going to encourage peace?

(2) Is this going to hurt and offend or help

and strengthen?

2. Remember that sabotaging saints hurts the work of God. (v. 20) You sabotage the saints when you flaunt your liberty, knowing that others have convictions against it.

3. Exercise your liberty only with those who can enjoy it with you. Restraining because of love.

4. Determine where you stand and refuse to play God in anyone else's life. By letting others be, you free up yourself to give full attention to what God is trying to make of you. When you're totally absorbed with that, you won't have the time or energy to hold on to someone else's life. Romans 14 is not a chapter about issues central to the faith. It is about peripheral things like meat sacrificed to idols and the observance of religious days. Paul's point is that these peripheral issues shouldn't cause division. The body of Christ should have unity AND diversity. It should not only incorporate a diversity of gifts (1 Cor. 12), but it should tolerate a diversity of opinions (Rom. 14).

Why don't we all pray for this horizontal grace to change our attitudes?

Dear Father, for those who would wish to go too far with liberty, the restraint of love is hard to hear. For those whose lives are marked by lists, the expression of any freedom is hard to hear...even harder to see. Let us all know that we answer to You and You alone. Make us understand that we should strive for unity in matters of faith, grace in matters of opinion, and love in all things! Lord, soften our hearts today. Lead us to confess our tendencies to compare and control. Make us live by the guidelines that magnify grace in our relationships with one another. Teach us that accepting others is basic to letting them be. Give us power to refuse to dictate to others, allowing You freedom to direct their lives. Allow us to understand that freeing others means we never assume a position we're not qualified to fill. Finally Father, make us understand that loving others requires us to express our liberty wisely. We do not deserve the

grace we have received. Let us treat others with that same grace—even when we don't believe they deserve it. Touch our hearts right now, God. Bring us to you for healing today. In the majestic and gracious name of Jesus I pray, AMEN.