

Aren't you thankful that we don't have to carry a catalogue list of things we can't do. I found a list of 19 things that are taboo in some circles. (It's safer than making my own). Here it is:

Going to movies Eating at restaurants that serve liquor
Wearing cosmetics Wearing certain clothing Playing cards
Holding certain jobs Wearing hair a certain way Watching TV
Driving certain cars Wearing jewelry Owning elegant possessions
Going to the beach Getting a face lift Listening to certain music
Dancing Drinking Coffee Eating certain foods
Working out in leotards Not having a daily quiet time

Before you snicker about that list remember this:

1. God sees the heart and he knows if people hold those convictions from the heart. We really don't need to change anyone who holds to any of those taboos.
2. Our relationship to others is more important than doing or not doing certain things. The Bible only speaks directly to one or two items on that list. Relationships really are God's priority.

Application

A. Have you noticed the shift in holiness that happened when Jesus came? In the O.T. holiness was all about separation – touch something unclean and you're excluded from the temple. But when Jesus touched that which was defiled he wasn't defiled:

He touched a leper and the leper was healed.

He touched a bleeding woman and she was cleansed

He touched a dead body the body came to life.

He attended a wild party filled with drinking, carousing, and prostitutes but instead of Jesus being defiled the host, Matthew, was converted and became a disciple.

B. Instead of being defiled by the world, we are called to go into the world and transform it. That's the power of the new holiness and the power of true freedom. We don't all have the same freedom; we're not all as strong in the faith. So we must allow God to judge our hearts. Are you committed to accepting others?

C. Listen to my heart on this: There are little currents among us that have the potential to split the church if we do not practice this lesson. This message is for us. Our life together depends on truths like this. May our legacy at RMBC be one in which the ancient theme of grace is practiced every day. It goes like this:

In essentials unity

In non-essentials liberty

In all things – charity (another word for grace).

D. Please ask yourself two questions as you go:

1. Do I add to other's load or do I lighten their load?
2. Do I grant freedom to others or do I restrict them?

“Putting Change in God's Hands” 3/07/10
Romans 14:1-12

RMBC
Pastor Dennis

Introduction

A. A little fellow was watching TV when his brother demanded that he change channels. “Who says I have to?” the little one shot back. The brother rolled up his fist, put it in the little brother's face and said, “These five fingers say you have to.” The little one gave in and walked out of the room. Around the corner he looked at his own hand and said, “Why can't you guys get organized like that?” It is absolutely crucial that we work together for Christ.

B. From the beginning of chapter 12, Paul has been teaching the believers how to love – in the church, in the home, and out in public. Here in chapter 14 he begins to show us that love does not try to change other people. God does want us to work together, to be organized and effective, but the road to unity is not paved with force, always with love. Friends, we need this message today!

C. In my reading this week I learned that during the Reformation of the 16th century Ulrich Zwingli, the reformer from Switzerland, and Martin Luther, the reformer from Germany, actually met in Marburg in Northern France to try to join hearts and minds in this exciting reformation that was spreading across Central Europe. For several days they debated 15 points of doctrine and in the end they agreed on all but the last one. Guess what it was – of all the important doctrines the one they couldn't agree on was the nature of communion. Luther insisted that it was the literal body of Christ while Zwingli believed it was symbolic of the body and blood of Christ.

What is sad is that they couldn't resolve their difference. Zwingli offered Luther the hand of fellowship saying, “Let's confess our union in all things we agree and as for the rest, let's remember we are brothers.” Luther refused saying, “You do not belong to the communion of the Christian Church.”

D. Now you know why we have denominations, and I believe this is why Paul wrote Romans 14. He saw the potential of churches splitting over differences of opinion that could be resolved if people offered each other more grace. Here's what Paul wrote: Read Romans 14:1-12.

Accepting Without Correcting

A. Would you personally evaluate yourself today in light of the opening line of verse 1? Are you able to accept others without passing judgment? To do so requires seeing the other as a brother or a sister in Christ – that is the key to accepting without correcting. Looking at you as my brother moves us together.

B. I'm told that the original language in this first paragraph uses the idea of accepting someone without any ulterior motive; without intending to argue about differences. In thinking about this I was reminded of how we communicate with our body language:

Only 5% of communication comes through content/words

Another 39% of communication comes through tone of voice

A whopping 45% of communication comes from body language

C. That's pretty sobering isn't it? If we truly are accepting of one another it will show – literally show. At the outset of this teaching Paul is establishing the fact that we belong to one another and changing others is not our first concern. We'll learn why later.

Who Is Weak – Who is Strong

A. You probably know this, but remember that the issue of food back in Rome, when Paul wrote this, was not about dieting, nutrition or weight control. The issue was giving moral value to physical, tangible things:

Jews, now Christians, had not eaten pork for 1400 years and their beef and lamb had to be prepared in a kosher manner.

Some believers were struggling to eat meat offered to idols before it was sold at the supermarket. They felt defiled if they did.

B. It's unfortunate that the NIV left off the definite article in referring to faith in vs. 2. That leads us to think of the size of one's faith or the strength of faith – how much faith I have. It's helpful to read this as “the faith” or one who is “weak in the faith” because that puts this in the context of maturity. “Strong in the faith” would refer to spiritual maturity and thus freedom. William Barclay mentions two reasons someone might be weak in the faith:

1. They may not have yet discovered the joy and meaning of Christian freedom. It is common to first see Christianity as a set of rules and a bunch of regulations, laws, or observances. That is a weakness.

2. We are weak in the faith until we are freed from the idea that our good works raise our favor with God. In his heart the weak in the faith thinks he can gain God's favor by doing certain things or refusing to do certain other things. And that thinking is not easy to overcome if it has been deeply ingrained in your mind.

C. If I could summarize I would say that the difference between being weak and strong is the difference between understanding and not understanding that truth leads to freedom. Now please hear me on this: Paul is not talking about areas in which the Bible is explicit and clear. Sin is clearly defined and named from the O.T. through the N.T. Drunkenness is sin; adultery is sin; jealousy and strife, bitterness and stealing are sin. In those areas the church has an obligation to judge the actions of the body according to the written Word of God. But those are not what Paul has in mind.

D. Again -- the strong in the faith will not try to change someone in an area not spelled out in Scripture. Would you agree that it is God's will and our goal to be strong in the faith? To be strong in the faith is to grasp the grace of God and live in the freedom of Christ! Let's discover why that is so important.

Living in Freedom

A. One of the freedoms that is a sign of being strong in the faith is the freedom to let others be. In our text Paul gives us several important reasons for that.

IT IS NOT OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO CHANGE OTHERS

When Paul writes in vs. 4 that we are not to “judge someone else's servant” he means that each of us is responsible to God in a direct way. When I recognize that you are my sister or my brother, I am also recognizing that God is your Father – your master and Lord. Know that takes the responsibility for your change off me.

I can recall a few times when my mom put me in charge of my younger sister when we were young. I never liked that. A little sister can really get in the way of a big brother when you are 7 and 5 years old, or 13 and 11. Little sisters have a mind of their own. What a relief when Mom returned.

That's the sense of freedom God wants us to have in relation to one another. We are free to love, free to interact, with no pressure to change each other. God is able to “make them stand” (vs. 4)

GOD HAS THE BEST VIEW – HE SEES THE HEART

Isn't it freeing to know that God can see the heart of things and of people? Look at vs. 5-6 where Paul writes about convictions and about doing things “as to the Lord.” I believe Paul's meaning here is that those who are weak in the faith are not simply trying to be hard to get along with. They are actually living out their convictions and God can see that.

I think of it like this: I am partially red/green color blind. As a result when I drive down the road I cannot see fruit on trees. An orchard can be loaded with peaches and all I see is foliage. Similarly, we are all partially color blind when it comes to judging the actions and attitudes – the heart – of others. But we can trust God's clearer and perfect vision to effect the changes that can represent true growth in grace and in knowledge.

RELATIONSHIPS TAKE PRIORITY OVER LIFESTYLE

I find encouragement in vs. 7-8. When we focus on changing others we move from relationship to preferences and tastes. But when we focus on relationships, we realize that we belong to the Lord. Our relationship to him feeds our relationships with others.

Introduction

It is crucial that we work _____ for the cause of Christ
The Great Reformation of the 16th Century:
Ulrich Zwingli -- _____
Martin Luther -- _____
They agreed on all but one point: _____
Their inability to agree resulted in present day _____

Accepting Without Correcting

Vs. 1 A call to _____ others without passing judgment
The key: Seeing the other as a _____ or _____ in Christ

We show acceptance by communication:

_____ of communication comes through content/words
_____ of communication comes through tone of voice
_____ of communication comes through body language

Changing one another is not our first _____

Who is Weak – Who is Strong

At issue in Rome: Giving _____ value to _____ things
Vs. 2: weak in faith = a measure of faith; how much I have
Weak in the faith = faith in context of _____

Two reasons for being weak in the faith:

1. Not yet discovered the joy/meaning of Christian _____
2. The idea that good works raises our _____ with God

Strong in the faith = understanding that truth leads to _____
Paul is not referring to explicitly clear sins named in the Bible
Strong in faith = not trying to change others in areas not spelled out in Scripture

Living in Freedom

Reasons to let others be:

1. It is not our _____ to change others vs. 4
2. God has the best view – he sees the _____ vs. 5-6
3. Relationships take priority over _____ vs. 7-8

Application

In the new holiness of Jesus, instead of being _____ by the world, we go into the world to _____ it.

The ancient theme of grace:

In essentials _____
In non-essentials _____
In all things _____ (grace)

For personal reflection:

1. Do I add to others’ load or do I lighten their load?
2. Do I grant freedom to others or do I restrict them?