

There is a great need for the ministry of restoration in the church. Christians are not perfect. Sometimes they stray, get bruised by sin, and even fall. Then what? The Bible gives us valuable counsel which we have been investigating on Wednesday evenings in our series entitled, "The Ministry of Restoration." Tonight we come to our fourth week.

Why is restoration so important? Why must we be involved in the ministry of recovery? We learned from II Cor 5 that we have been given the ministry of Reconciliation. And according to Gal 6:1, we are to take the initiative when we see a fallen fellow-Christian. Last week we learned about the process of restoration by looking at Jesus' example of restoring fallen Peter, in John 21.

The Ministry of Restoration--Romans 15:1-3

There are times in the church when we disagree. Christians are not clones. We have differences in background, personalities, and tastes. At times we'll have differences of opinion. And when that happens, some Christians become paralyzed by the differences. They lose their effectiveness for Christ.

How do you help a fellow-Christian who may disagree with you? How do you restore a brother whose opinion happens to differ with yours? We find out in Romans 15.

READ Rom 15:1-3

Background/Setting:

Romans 14-15 When Christians Disagree

A. The People

1. Jewish Christians
2. Gentile Christians

B. The Disagreement

1. Special Diets (14:2)
2. Special Days (14:5-6)

I. The Individuals (1)

A. The Strong

=those not enslaved to diets and days

B. The Weak

=immature believers who felt obligated to obey legalistic rules

(Wiersbe, 558)

Key: The person who lives by extra-biblical rules is the "weak" Christian.

II. The Responsibilities (2)

A. All of us are to "receive one another" (14:1; 15:7).

B. The strong are to bear with the failings of the weak.

III. The Reason (3)

*Be like Christ.

Background/Setting:

Rom 14-15 When Christians Disagree (Wiersbe)

What should we do when we disagree over issues not addressed in Scripture? Christians come out of different backgrounds. This was very true in Rome .

A. The People

1. Jewish Christians--grew up with Judaism

2. Gentile Christians--grew up with raw paganism

The Jews were saved out of a strict, legalistic background. It was not easy for them to forget this after they were saved. Two areas were very important to the Jews. This was the heart of the disagreement.

B. The Disagreement

1. Special Diets (14:2)

The Jews had tremendous, detailed dietary laws. They had lists of rules on what you could eat, when you could eat, even how you could eat. After they became Christians, they had trouble dropping these rules. Some Jewish Christians even thought it was a sin to eat meat, so they ate only vegetables. Others couldn't bear the thought of eating meat bought at a market place which sold meat offered to pagan idols.

You can understand their position, can't you? But can you also understand how the Gentile Christians felt? "Meat is meat! Why NOT eat the meat bought at Jupiters' Butcher? It's the best meat in town! We don't believe in the false god it was offered to, so what's the problem?"

2. Special Days (14:5-6)

The Jews had an elaborate list of "holy" days on their calendar. Special days were sacred. Especially the sabbath. They had a long list of rules (non-biblical) about how to behave on the sabbath. You don't cook on the

sabbath. You don't walk more than 1/2 (?) a mile on the sabbath.

The Gentiles had no such convictions. So what should a church do that has two groups that have such different opinions/convictions? Briscoe (245), "One solution would have been simply to put the conservatives in one group and the liberals in another and keep them away from each other." But Christ didn't say He would build His "churches" but His Church, singular. Unity in diversity.

What's the biblical way to handle such a dilemma?

Key: We're talking about "gray areas." Some activities we know are right because the Bible commands them (worship, giving, love, taking care of parents). Others we know are wrong because the Bible condemns them (gossip, immorality, stealing). Romans 14-15 has to do with issues NOT clearly defined in Scripture.

Objection: "Do we have issues like that today?"

eg--Studying on Sunday (playing ball)

eg--Clapping in church worship (raising hands)

eg--Clothing styles

eg--Going to church at 10:30 and 6:00 on Sunday (why not Saturday at 6:00 and Sunday at 10:00; or only Sunday PM?)

How should we deal with issues of disagreement in the church? How do we do "recovery work" when there are divergent opinions?

I. The Individuals (1)

A. The Strong

Who are the strong Christians?

=those not enslaved to diets and days

B. The Weak

=immature believers who felt obligated to obey legalistic rules

Key: The person who lives by extra-biblical rules is the "weak" Christian. Wiersbe offers this insight (558), "Many people have the idea that the Christians who follow strict rules are the most mature, but this is not necessarily the case. In the Roman assemblies, the weak Christians were those who clung to the Law and did not enjoy their freedom in Christ."

Here was the problem. The "weak" Jewish brothers condemned the Gentiles brothers ("How can you do THAT?"). The Gentiles despised their Jewish brothers ("Don't be a stick in the mud! Get with the times!").

Contemporary parallel: "I don't see how you can come to Wednesday PM church without a tie on. Good Christians wear a tie when they come to church." Response, "Oh, don't be old-fashioned!"

What's the biblical way to work through this?

II. The Responsibilities (2)

A. All of us are to "receive one another" (14:1; 15:7).

14:1 "Receive"

15:7 "Receive one another"

Discuss: What does that mean?

Practically, it means we are not to "judge" each other in matters of personal preference (14:1, 10, 13). I have no right to "play God" in your life. We are to defer our rights. We are not to let personal preferences be more important than the good of the church (14:20-21).

Did you realize there was a time when some dedicated Christians were opposed to Christian radio? Why? Because Satan is the prince of the power of the air! (Wiersbe, 559)

Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker were great preachers of the gospel in England . Yet Spurgeon accused Parker of being unspiritual because he went to the theater. Yet Spurgeon smoked cigars! Who was right? Who was wrong?

Ok, we are to receive each other. But the difference still exists. It's a barrier. So now what?

B. The strong are to bear with the failings of the weak.

15:1 "The strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak"

Who is to take the initiative? The strong.

Listen. Some of the things we do in church are based on tradition, not Scripture. Like what?

eg--organ music; passing offering plates; preaching behind a pulpit

Does that mean these things are not important? No. They are very important to some people.

Discuss: What are strong Christians to do when there are areas of difference?

See V 2--I must focus on what is good for my brother, not myself. I must aim to please my brother, not myself. Unity takes work (14:19).

Key: I must not let personal preferences be more important than the work of God in the church (14:20-21).

Why is it so important? V 3

III. The Reason (3)

*Be like Christ.

Our Goal: Vv 5-6 Seek unity so God will be glorified in and through us.