

haven't found a way to ground the birds when planes are approaching.

Because of the speed of the plane, even a small bird can do a lot of damage. Especially if one is ingested into an engine. If a bird strikes the fan blade of the engine that blade can be displaced into another blade and that into another and so on, causing a cascading failure which can quickly make shrapnel of the whole engine. And that's what happened on Jan.15 – not just with one engine, but two.

The point is that little things can be a big nuisance. Things that are good and beautiful and desirable and useful, but minor, can cause great harm.

And that's true in the church. How many churches have crashed because of small disagreements over non-essentials? Churches rarely divide because of major doctrinal differences. Almost always it's minor differences that cause major damage.

And that's tragic. It's sad to hear about and painful to be a part of. It makes you want to do everything you can to avoid having that happen in your church, doesn't it?

Well right now you have the opportunity to do something to save your church from a bird strike.

Several weeks ago our Pastor, Sharad Yadav, gave a brilliant exposition of the Lord's Supper from 1 Cor. 11. After that series, the elders started talking about how to make our observance of the Lord's Supper more like a meal, more of a family celebration, a more central part of our community life together, a more visible expression of our unity. So we decided to start including communion at our Gospel Communities – that's a natural opportunity since we're sharing a meal anyway. That's one way. Then we said, why can't we have a fellowship meal together on Communion Sundays? Why not? We could abbreviate the service up here, then move downstairs and serve lunch and share the bread and the cup as part of our meal, making it more like the Lord's Supper, more like the Love Feasts the early Christians enjoyed. Alright, it'll be a challenge to pull off down there, but let's try it. Then someone said, "Well can we have real bread and not just a fingernail flake of flour and lard?" Sure, if we're going to really eat a meal, we should eat real food. Why not? That led to, "Well what about the cup? A lot of people in our church drink wine with their meals, is there any reason we couldn't include wine? Hmm. No *biblical* reason. You want to make that option available? Sure, why not? Lots of churches do.

Now that was our thinking process, which we tried to summarize and share with you in the bulletin. We had made the decision earlier to start posting

a brief synopsis of our elder meetings in the bulletin (for lack of a better place) just to be more transparent with you and keep you informed of the kinds of things that we're discussing as an elder team; the goal being that we could continue to dialogue openly and gradually work toward implementing those things.

Well the news about including wine created quite a stir. And we were actually quite surprised by that, and frankly, troubled by some of the things we've heard.

But someone asked a very thoughtful question about why we would even consider including wine at the communion table, so while Sharad was answering questions, he took a whole morning to try and answer that. And as elders we were elated with his answer, and thought he did a superb job of representing our team and our perspective.

But there's still tension in the air. People are still talking about it. Some of you are still pretty upset. I've heard that a few have even threatened to leave the church. So obviously we need to keep talking about it. And that's what I want to do this morning. One more perspective, one more angle, from a passage we haven't brought to the table explicitly, but one that certainly applies. Turn with me to Romans 14.

And before I read this text, let me make myself perfectly clear: *this passage is for all of us.*

Some of you are troubled by the possibility that someone would drink wine in church. What that says to me is that you still think of the church as a place, this building, rather than a people. Because many of these people that you worship with in this building will go home today and enjoy a glass of wine with their meal. So what you really have a problem with is not Christians drinking wine in church. What you have a problem with is Christians in the church drinking wine! This passage is for you.

On the other side of the aisle, some of you love your liberty more than your family. You are so determined to exercise and enjoy your freedom and not let anyone deprive you of your liberty to eat meat and drink wine and go fishing on a Sunday that your attitude toward other Christians borders on, "They can blow it out their ear." This passage is for you.

So all of us need to listen and hear what God is saying, not to the other person, but to me.

READ Rom.14:1 – 15:6.

Now the first observation we make is that Paul calls some Christians weak and some strong, yet they're both Christians and they both belong in the church.

And so this whole passage is not about eliminating the distinction and getting everybody into the same category. *The whole passage is about how to hold a church together when the members are so different from each other.* In every church there will be these differences between believers and we have to learn to live together in harmony. We need the diversity and we should treasure it just as much as we do the unity.

So I take it as a given, first of all, that there will be differences between us, and *that's not the problem.* That's not the problem, and therefore that's *not* what we need to eliminate or minimize. The problem, and what we need to minimize, is the conflict and division that hinders the Gospel that can result if we don't respond to each other in *the right ways.* But the right way is not to force everyone into the same category. The right way is not to leave the church and find one where everybody is the same as you. To do that you'd have to find a very small church. The right way, please notice, is also not to say to both groups: "Lighten up, don't have such strong convictions." Paul doesn't say that here. He doesn't say, "That's the problem in your church – your convictions are too strong." No he says in **vs.5** – *Let each person be fully convinced in his own mind.* And in **vs.22** – *"The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God."* There's nothing wrong with having strong convictions – I should. But I have to allow you to

do the same, and not insist that my strong convictions are more appropriate than your strong convictions. (More on that in a minute.)

So the weak and the strong – Paul’s choice of terms, not mine – both have faith and both belong side by side in the same church. And so the question is how on earth are we going to make that work for the greater progress of the Gospel?

Well, I can summarize the whole section with three imperatives: Don’t judge, accept; don’t destroy, love; don’t divide, unite. Let me walk you through that as best I can.

1. Don’t judge – accept!

That’s the first half of ch.14. Don’t judge one another, accept one another. That’s the first thing he says – **vs.1** – *“Now accept the one who is weak in faith.”*

Who is that? As defined by the context, it’s the brother who doesn’t eat meat, or drink wine, or play golf on the Sabbath. It could be a Jewish believer who still felt obligations to the Mosaic Law and felt bound by conscience to keep the Sabbath and avoid meat that might be unclean. Or it could be a Gentile believer who knows that the meat sold in the market came from the pagan temples where it was first offered to idols and so he refuses to have anything to do with eating meat because it conjures up everything

associated with his past idolatry. Same with drinking wine – he’s seen and even participated in the drunken orgies that were part of pagan worship, and now that he’s been delivered from that, he seeks to avoid everything that is remotely related to his former manner of life. But in either case, the weaker brother does not feel the freedom of conscience to participate in those things. Because of his religious background, because of his sinful past, because of his upbringing, his culture, his education, his parents, his peers, all that has shaped his conscience up to this point, tells him that eating the meat or drinking wine or violating the Sabbath is wrong for him to do. Even though his new Christian friends may be telling him it’s okay, his conscience still says otherwise, and so he refrains. He eats vegetables. He drinks water. He gathers with believers on the Lord’s Day but he still keeps the Sabbath, too. And that’s good, that’s the right thing for him to do, because it would be dangerous to violate his conscience.

But that’s the issue: the conscience of each individual believer. In fact, Paul makes that explicit in **1 Cor.8:7**, speaking of the freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols, he says, *“However, not all men have this knowledge, but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.”* In other words, because they associate the meat with idolatry, their conscience would make them feel

guilty if they ate the meat. “Their conscience being weak is defiled.” And I take that to be a parallel with Rom.14. The “weak in faith” in Rom.14 are the “weak in conscience” of 1 Cor.8. Their faith is *weak* in the sense that to do these things would violate their conscience and make them feel guilty and sinful, even though these things in themselves are not sinful.

See your conscience is like the smoke alarm in your house. Some of them go off every time you strike a match to light a candle. Overly sensitive. And that’s very annoying. Now what you don’t want to do is just pull out the battery, because then when you really need it to go off it won’t. And that’s what happens when you repeatedly ignore or violate your conscience, you eventually silence it. What would be better is to somehow be able to adjust it or recalibrate it so it discerns the difference between a real fire threat and burnt toast.

And that’s what we’re after as believers. We want our conscience (our alarm system) to be in sync with the Scriptures and the mind of Christ so that it goes off when it should but not when it shouldn’t.

But we’re all at different stages of that process, some weaker, some stronger – what are we to do? Accept one another.

READ v.1-3a.

That's enough right there to solve all our problems! You may *not* criticize, condemn, or judge your brother or sister in Christ over these issues. Period. End of discussion. If you eat or drink, you may not look down your nose at those who don't. If you don't eat meat or drink wine, you may not judge (which means to condemn as guilty of sinning) those who do.

We must stop judging one another and accept one another!

And then he gives some reasons. *Four reasons why every believer must accept, receive, and welcome into his life and fellowship, every other believer.*

Reason 1. He is accepted by God.

v.3 - *“For God has accepted him.”*

Who are you to not accept whom God does accept?

Now you've got a big problem if you're going to reject the person God receives.

Rom.8:33 *Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”*

God decides who is accepted, and on what basis, not you, not me. We are accepted by God on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ. His blood and righteousness make us welcome. And we need

to be make sure that the basis of our acceptance of each other is not something different than the basis of God's acceptance of us.

So that's the first reason: God's acceptance of us in Christ is the foundation of our forbearance of one another, no matter how great our differences of opinion.

Reason 2. You are not in charge of your brother! READ v.4.

When you are tempted to judge another believer, you need to stop and remember that you are not their master. Your brother does not answer to you. If his master says he can drink wine, who are you to question that? What do you care?

How would you feel if every time you gave instructions to your children, your neighbor came over and corrected you, or told them to do the exact opposite of what you said? Eventually, no matter how godly you are, you would have to say, "My dear friend, you are my neighbor, and I love my neighbor, but these are my children, so will you kindly butt out!"

I wonder if we don't often insult the Lord by the way we interfere in His business or manipulate His servants and try to boss them around and control them and make them do what we want them to

do instead of leaving people alone and letting the Lord be their Master.

Listen, even if your brother is doing something wrong, his Master knows, He is more than able to intervene in His good time? Of every believer in this room we need to say to ourselves, “the Lord is His Master, not me.” “The Lord is able to make him stand, and stand he will.”

Reason 3. We need to accept one another because every true believer does what he does to please the Lord.

Do you believe that? I do. Look at vs.5.

READ vs.5-9.

What is Paul saying? He’s saying, “Look, do we not all belong to the Lord and live for the Lord?” Of course! I do what I do in reverence and gratitude and submission to the Lord. You do what you do in reverence and gratitude and submission to the Lord. Who’s right? We’re both right!

True Christians on both sides of these issues are glorifying God in what they do! Do you get that? And these are exact opposites – one eats, another does not eat – both do it for the Lord; both give thanks. How can that be? How can two opposite things be equally acceptable and pleasing to God!? That’s what we struggle with isn’t it?

But that's exactly what Paul is saying. You can eat to the glory of God; you can choose not to eat to the glory of God. You can drink wine to the glory of God; you can choose not to drink wine to the glory of God. You can keep the Sabbath to the glory of God; you can treat every day alike to the glory of God.

What's the principle?

The Lordship of Jesus is big enough for both of us to do what we believe is right in the eyes of the Lord and both things be pleasing to Him; both actions be acceptable to Him; both choices be a legitimate and welcome expression of our devotion to Him.

Now don't get carried away here. You can't murder to the glory of God. You can't steal to the glory of God. You can't commit adultery to the glory of God. You can't be arrogant to the glory of God. But there are a hundred things we can disagree on in which both ways can still be done to the glory of God. You can abstain and deny yourself all kinds of earthly things to the glory of God; and you can delight yourself with all kinds of earthly things to the glory of God. Things as opposite as eating and not eating can glorify God. Wow.

And Paul goes one better – things as opposite as life and death can glorify God.

Just think about the greatest difference that can exist between two believers. What is the widest possible chasm that can separate one believer from another or one group of believers from another? Someone might say, “Doctrine. Calvinist and Arminian.” “Catholic and Protestant.” “Charismatic and non-Charismatic.” Nope. Someone else might say, “race: Jew and Gentile.” Nope.

It’s right there in vs.9 – “dead and alive.” Are those not the two ultimate extremes? And how many believers fit into those two categories. All. And which of those two categories is Jesus Lord over? Both. And which kind of believer, the dead ones or the living ones, please the Lord and love the Lord? Both.

The Lordship of Jesus is big enough for the dead and the living; therefore, it’s surely big enough for all the living, some of whom are weak and some of whom are strong.

One brother confesses that “Jesus is Lord,” and believes that in his eating, he is living for the Lord. Another brother confesses “Jesus is Lord” and believes that in his not eating, he is living for the Lord. And Paul’s point is, both are true.

So accept one another. Live for the Lord and let your brother do the same. Be fully convinced in your own mind that you are doing the right thing and trust your brother to do the same. Whether you eat or drink *or not*, do all to the glory of God.

Reason 4. You should accept your brother without being judgmental because – vs.10-12 – you will both stand before the judgment seat of God and give an account for what you did, not what he did.

READ vs.10-12.

Why would you judge your brother when 1) the Lord will judge Him soon enough; and 2) you have enough to do preparing your own defense. Right? Each of us will give an account of himself to God. That's enough to worry about, isn't it? Leave your brother alone.

So I say, in these non-essential matters of eating meat or not, drinking wine or not, keeping holy days or not, we must first of all stop judging and accept one another. Why? Because we are all *accepted*, we are all *owned*, we are all *governed*, we are all *judged* by the Lord.

Look around the room and say “The Lord accepts him.” “The Lord owns her.” “The Lord rules His life.” “The Lord will judge us and His opinion is the one that matters.”

Don't despise those who don't drink wine by calling them legalistic. And don't condemn those who drink wine by calling them worldly. Each of you accept your brother and stop passing judgment on his opinions.

Now someone may say, “You’re right Pastor, I know it’s okay for my brother to drink wine, but I’m concerned about the influence that could have on others, especially immature believers.” Good point, so am I. And that’s Paul’s concern too, and that’s what he deals with in vs.13-23, which I summarize as:

2. Don’t destroy, love!

To those with a strong conscience that enjoy their liberties in Christ and know with Paul (v.14) that nothing is unclean in itself, he gives this warning:
 Vs.13 – do not put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way.

Vs.15 – don’t destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.

Vs.16 – “Don’t let what is for you a good thing be spoken of us evil.”

Vs.20 – “Don’t tear down the work of God for the sake of food.”

Or to state it positively:

Vs.15 – walk according to love.

Vs.19 – pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

But please notice what he doesn’t say. He doesn’t say stop drinking wine; stop eating meat. He doesn’t give us a simple formula or rule. He refuses to make it that easy for us. He leaves the decision in your lap, to make day by day, depending on where you are and who you’re with

and what the circumstances are. He forces us to walk by the Spirit and seek the mind of Christ and examine our hearts and motives, and we have to do that all the time in every new situation. So our life as a Christian is not mechanical, it's spiritual. It's not blind heartless conformity to a list of do's and don'ts; it's a dynamic, personal, relationship with the living Christ where I have to seek and submit to Him moment by moment of every day.

You want a rule. This is as close Paul gets: **Read vs.22-23**. What's the rule? If you can't do it with a clear conscience, don't do it. If you can, good for you, enjoy your liberty.

And to those of you who say, "The elders need to be role models; people are watching you; people are going to follow your example." To you I humbly and boldly say this: We know that, and we invite you to follow our example. Do what we do. Do exactly what we do. Either abstain because you can't stand the stuff and you couldn't touch it anyway for health reasons (that's what some of us do). Or enjoy meat and wine in moderation with thanksgiving because everything created by God is good (that's what some of us do). But don't use what we do as an excuse to do what we don't do (we don't get drunk with wine or linger long over wine).

Yes the church needs models, but more than anything it needs models of self-control, wisdom,

Spirit-led living, passion for the glory of God, joyful satisfaction in the blessings of God, and gospel-intentionality; people who can take two commands – love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself – and never need another rule because from those two alone they can make appropriate application for every conceivable life situation; people who see all things as either sin or faith and live by faith.

That's the kind of example we want to set for you and your children. Please pray for us.

That leads to my final appeal.

1. Don't judge, accept.
2. Don't destroy, love.

3. Don't divide, unite!

That's my summary of 15:1-6.

And why should we do that? Why should people with such different strong convictions accept and love each other and get along and stay together?

- a. To help each other.

READ vs.1-2.

- b. To follow the example of Christ.

READ vs.3.

- c. To honor the Scripture and learn how to use it.

READ vs.4.

d. To glorify God.

READ vs.5-6.

Harry Ironside: "It is very evident that Christians will never see eye to eye on all points. We are so largely influenced by habits, by environment, by education, by the measure of intellectual and spiritual apprehension to which we have attained, that it is an impossibility to find any number of people who look at everything from the same standpoint. How then can such be of one mind? The apostle himself explains it elsewhere when he says, 'I think also that I have the mind of Christ.' The "mind of Christ" is the lowly mind. And, if we are all of this mind, we shall walk together in love, considering one another, and seeking rather to be helpers of one another's faith, than challenging each other's convictions."

What's it going to be Nampa Bible Church? Are we going to stand together on the big things or be ruined by the little things? I say we strive to be of one mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord we may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.