

Romans 14:17-15:2

The Kingdom of God is...
Peace and Mutual Edification



Vs. 17 – The Kingdom of God, the church should be preeminent - is supposed to be a taste of heaven – a place that is known for it's righteousness, peace, and the joy of God! The church on earth is supposed to be a repository of heavenly traits! Greatly flawed and formerly unrighteous people are changed, recreated by God, to be the image-bearers of His Son on a fallen, dark, unrighteous, conflict sodden, and terribly sad world. In taking on His character traits, we are tasked with creating a little piece of heaven on earth – a place where people congregate, people that are uniquely loving, safe to be around, faithful to each other, solid/stable – not emotionally up and down, secure in Christ, focused and anchored in absolute truth!



Grace

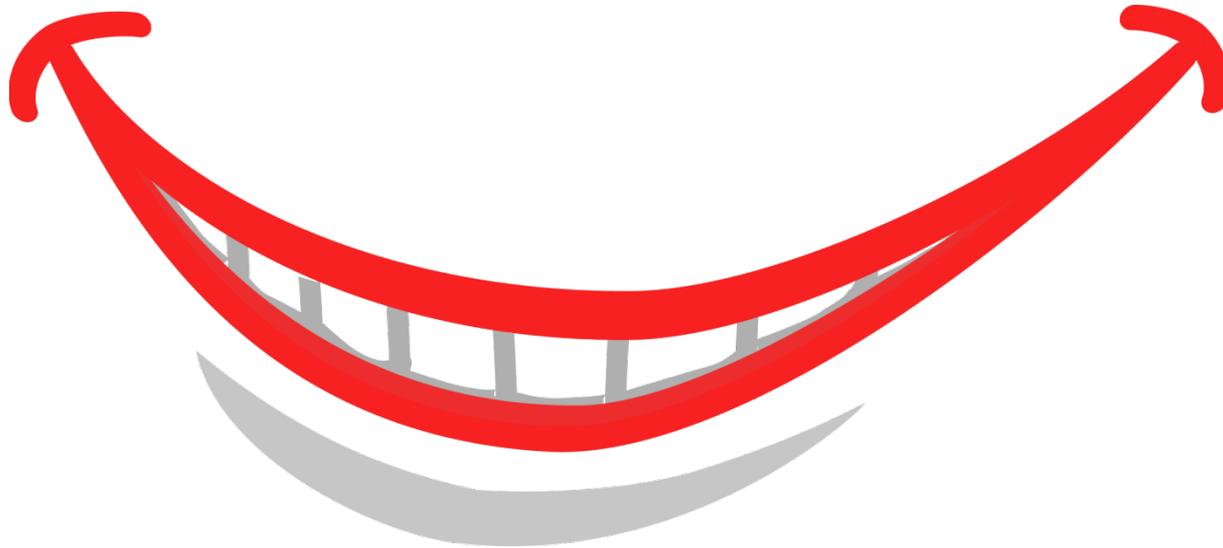
The church is a place where people give acceptance and grace to each other.

Grace overlooks differences of personality, background, status - and the mistakes, foibles, and even betrayals of others.

Grace forgives, gives second and third chances, tries to understand, practices inclusion. Grace does not begin with suspicion. It does not condemn first and ask questions later. It is not that grace never judges. Christ-followers must judge. But grace is just, gets both sides of the story, gets the facts, is very cautious about coming to hard-line conclusions. We are not God, and should judge accordingly! We have our own issues so we judge others with full knowledge of that fact. It should serve to make us more merciful, less willing to jump to conclusions!



Vs. 18 – This is how we serve God. Make no mistake about it. We don't serve God by criticizing and picking other people apart! We serve Him by serving them (even if it may seem that some don't deserve it), through lifting, carrying, and building people up! This creates and sustains an environment of approval and earns the smile of God!



Vs. 19 – “do what leads to peace and to mutual edification”

Edification – working toward the growth and improvement of each other. We are helping each other become more like Jesus.



We work as a team to follow Jesus and accomplish His purposes. Loners have not climbed on board (fellowship). Loners need to find a way to connect – to become a part of a team. There are many teams in a church that are all part of the overall team. Every committee where people are working together is place of fellowship, acceptance, edification, connection, dedication, and friendship.

Vs. 20 – “Do not destroy the work of God...”

The Spirit of God works hard at creating strong bonds. This is what the Fruit of the Spirit does – it’s natural and supernatural effect creates an atmosphere where people enjoy and like each other! Why would someone want to jeopardize that? It is a case of someone reverting back, of feeling empowered by a “conviction” to destroy the work of God. This is a case of a sheep becoming a wolf!



It is desperately important that the other sheep do not gravitate toward the wolf. It is a weird human thing that this should happen with regularity. People should be absolutely turned off when someone in the body acts in ways unbecoming a Christ-follower. But many are drawn into the circle of a bully, - a grandstander, an attacker. But it is the responsibility of the others, after deliberation, to surround and neutralize a threat to the body.

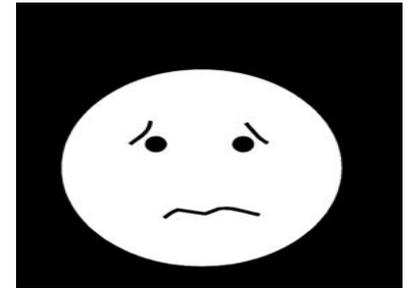
1. Reason and love – intervention
2. Firm and resolute discipline – removal from responsibility
3. Expulsion from the body

Vs. 20,21 – A message to gentiles. Be careful that in your freedom of conscience, you do not lead someone without freedom of conscience (in inconsequential matters) to violate their conscience and participate in eating, drinking, or non-observance of Jewish holy days. You would be ruining them - leading them into sin! Sin, by this definition is not necessarily just the act of wrongdoing, but sin can be a simple violation of conscience, even if the act of wrongdoing is not actually wrong to do. It is wrong to violate your conscience!



Vs. 22,23 - Don't force the issue on debatable matters/practices! Just don't bring it up! Certainly don't *flaunt it* in front of the people that feel differently! They know, so don't make a point of rubbing salt in the wound! On the other hand, to those on the other side of the debate – stop passing judgment!

A person with a clear conscience that can know without a doubt in the world that in Christ they are cleared by God to be released from Israel's ties to the Law of Moses – that person is a *God blessed* person! But not so blessed if he or she doesn't care about the tortured conscience and weak faith of the person(s) they are tempting. They are doing the Devil's work for him – destroying, disrupting, causing concern and angst!



Angst: feelings of anxiety, fear, or unease, often over something trivial.

Vs. 23 – “...*condemned... because... his eating is not from faith...*”

The definition of sin is widened here. It is sin to, in the back of your mind, fear whether a thing is wrong to do, and yet go ahead with doing it.



A deep faith in Christ absolves a person of this obligation in many areas of belief and practice. A person that grasps this is a person that truly understands a pillar of the faith. Christ is enough! He alone saves! We can't supplement His salvation by our prescriptions or prohibitions of things that don't matter to God.

Ecclesiastes 7:16-18

15:1,2 – *“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak”*

The strong in faith have their priorities right. They realize that it is more important to build the joyful Presence of Christ in the church body than to exercise our personal rights in Christ.

Christ gives us freedom, but being around people can constrain us/give us pause.

The last thing we want is to be the cause of someone else’s downfall. So we often do not exercise our rights. We are all about building people up and not tearing them down. We know our audience and act accordingly. If we don’t care, we cannot be of Christ.



James 4:17 – “...to him it is sin”

It is also a sin to know a thing is the **right** thing to do and yet let it go undone. (sin of omission/sin of procrastination/ sin of good intentions)

