

# Unashamed (22): Dealing with Dummies for Dummies

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(Romans 14:1-23)

## I. Introduction

- A. In the 80's, KFC claimed to be the best because they did only one thing— *just chicken*
1. If you focus only on one thing, then you can do that one better than anyone else
  2. So their ad slogan, in addition to “*finger lickin’ good*” was, “*We do chicken right.*”
- B. Well, from the very beginning of our movement, we’ve tried to do TWO things right
1. **Unity:** Stone-Campbell “*Restoration Movement*” began as an emphasis on unity.
    - a. After the revivals of 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening, believers wanted to worship together
    - b. But denominational divisions and creeds made real fellowship and unity difficult
    - c. Our movement was born out a desire for unity, “*Let unity be our polar star.*” (Stone)
  2. **Restoration:** As committed as we were to unity, we were also committed to truth
    - a. If denominational creeds or confessions separated believers... *then get rid of them! Back to the Bible. Christians Only. Speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where it is silent.*
    - b. Alexander Campbell saw “*Ancient Order of Things*” as key to returning us to unity
    - c. But slogans are easy, focusing on truth while maintaining real unity is not easy at all
  3. You see, there is a sense in which unity and truth seem in competition with each other
    - a. The more we insist on being RIGHT on the issues, the harder it is to be UNITED
      - 1) That is particularly true if we insist that everyone must be right on every detail.
      - 2) That’s our history; more we focus on getting it right— more fracture and divide
    - b. So at some point we decided to be KJC and only do one thing— gave up on unity!
    - c. We’re not KFC! We can’t do one thing. Unity is a mission from God (**Eph 4:2-3**)
- C. We continue with our look at Romans in our series *Unashamed* we come to **Romans 14**
1. Here we come to what in Latin is *nitti-gritti* of differences between Jews and Romans
    - a. They’re all Christians, but they had very different backgrounds and presuppositions.
      - 1) Jews saw world with Jewish eyes, so kosher foods and special days mattered
      - 2) Romans couldn’t see the big deal, or why eating a pagan ham hurt anything
    - b. Those different ways of looking at world didn’t just wash away with their baptism.
  2. There’s a series of introduction type books on all kinds of topics— “*...for Dummies*”
    - a. I decided to call this sermon, “*Dealing with Dummies for Dummies.*” Catchy, huh?
    - b. **Problem:** We think those who disagree with us are dummies... *Go on, just admit it.*
    - c. Paul is doing to give us dummies some help here on dealing with other dummies!

## II. On Dealing with Dummies: The Background

- A. The specific issues at Rome here were eating meats and observing special days (**14:2,5**)
1. These folks were dummies! These are obviously matters of opinion. *What's the deal?*
    - a. OK, you've probably known some vegans who were hard-nosed about their beliefs
    - b. Arguing over holy days? Two deacons in a war over putting up Christmas wreaths
    - c. Most people who aren't dummies would dismiss all of this as just matters of opinion
  2. Or maybe some at Rome had read what would become part of scripture (**Acts 15:29**)
    - a. **Issue:** To what extreme should Christians go to distance themselves from idols?
      - 1) Much of the meat sold in places like Rome was dedicated in the pagan temples
      - 2) Faithful Christians (*those not dummies*) would only eat broccoli— no meat!
    - b. Christians with an issue **always** have a text! *These good folks had a good text!*
  3. Some matters that aren't disputable; Paul begins in **Rom 1** with sins of pagan world
- B. Problem here isn't that folks aren't concerned with truth. *They read it with different eyes!*
1. The Jewish Christians at Rome read the Bible through very Jewish eyes (**Acts 21:20**)
    - a. Christian Jews continued to relate to God as Jews; how could it have been different!
    - b. Christ was Messiah! They continue to observed all of their special feasts and fasts
    - c. They did church much like they had synagogue. All was changed to honor Christ!
  2. But the Gentiles Christians came to the gospel with a completely different set of eyes
    - a. What did they think of Jewish feasts? What would Jews think old pagan feast days?
    - b. How much energy did Gentiles devote to accommodating Jewish dietary restriction?
      - 1) How is table fellowship even possible when they couldn't agree what to serve?
      - 2) How is unity possible if I think your most sacred practices are silly and dumb?
- C. Jews and Gentiles had issues over the issues! The trick was to keep your eye on Jesus
1. Paul argues that one's position on these issues didn't really matter (**Rom 14:4**)
    - a. Justification and sanctification before God doesn't depend on having right view.
    - b. God accepts people as being **RIGHT** before Him who are **WRONG** on the issues!
      - 1) If we can just believe that, then we can just relax and chill on a lot of things
      - 2) Point: If God accept them, then it's probably a good idea we accept each other
  2. **Note:** Paul doesn't focus on the issues themselves; he really has bigger fish to fry!
    - a. He will admit in passing that a pork chop really is just a pork chop (**Rom 14:14a**)
    - b. But that not his main focus really; there's more important things than being right!

### III. On Dealinbg with Dummies: Accepting One Another

- A. Paul basic command here is simply this— “*Accept one who faith is weak*” (**Rom 14:1**)
1. Who is the weak brother? That is Paul’s code for the one who disagree with you?
    - a. He assumes you’re the strong one. Great! Now give in and “*accept*” the weak!
    - b. This “*accept*” is repeated as “one another” command Paul sums up in **Romans 15:7**
    - c. Why accept them? We’ve already seen the reason. “*God has accepted them*” (**14:3**)
  2. The word “*accept*” here in the NIV is translated “*receive*” (NET) or “*welcome*” (ESV)
    - a. The word here is *proslambanō* and means “*to take to oneself*” or “*take by the hand.*”
      - 1) It is the word used when Peter took Jesus aside to set him straight (**Matt 16:22**)
      - 2) It’s used of when Aquila and Pricilla took Apollos aside to teach (**Act 18:26**)
      - 3) It’s what Paul tells Philemon to do when he sends Onesimus to him (**Phile 17**)
    - b. “*Accept one another*” is more than “*grit your teeth and put up with*” the dummies
    - c. Paul is saying to accept and take by the hand (fellowship) those we disagree with
  3. We accept wrong-headed people because that is exactly how God as accepted us!
- B. What does that mean? Let me suggest four principles that point to this polar star of unity
1. **First**, we must accept those we disagree with without looking down on them (**14:3**)
    - a. We don’t have to agree on all the issues. In fact, we CANNOT agree on the issues!
      - 1) Would Jewish Christians and Roman Christians EVER see food issues alike?
      - 2) Can high church Presbyterians & happy-clappy Pentecostals see worship alike?
      - 3) The best church dress code? Dressed to 9’s? Business casual? Wear clothes
    - b. We don’t have to agree to be family—but we must respect one another’s faith!
    - c. We will never “*accept one another*” in Christ until we can “*respect one another.*”
  2. **Second**, that means that we must steadfastly refuse to judge other’s motives (**14:6**)
    - a. Even if we disagree on important issues, we can share motivation to glorify God
      - 1) We can fuss all we want about our preferred styles of church worship music
      - 2) But we can thank God we share the SAME desire to praise our glorious kking!
    - b. What we tend to do is assign motives for why people believe what they believe
      - 1) “*All you care about is preserving status quo and afraid of anything new*”
      - 2) “*Yeah, you would think that because you’re Bible-hating, panty-waist liberal!*”
      - 3) Notice, Paul assumes all of their differences arise from mutual love of God!
    - c. Give folks benefit of doubt; they are seeking to serve God on a different trajectory

3. **Third**, we must give up trying to CONTROL other Christians (**Rom 14:22**)
  - a. Why does Paul later tell Timothy to stay away from arguments? (**2 Tim 2:23-24**)
    - 1) It wasn't that Timothy wouldn't enjoy a good tussle ever now-and-again
    - 2) It's precisely because he did enjoy it! That the "*evil desires of youth!*" (**2:22**)
  - b. To constantly argue over the issues only serves to drive the wedges between us.
    - 1) There is a time to patiently study, openly share. *Need more honest discussion*
    - 2) There's also time to treasure our beliefs and liberty and keep our mouths shut
    - 3) There's never a time for bitter debate, belittling others, anything to drive wedge
  - c. Paul defends our right to private beliefs & practice; he wants them to stay that way!
4. **Fourth**, we must love the church MORE than we love getting our way (**14:15**)
  - a. Church is supposed to help us and others get to heaven—not to make it harder!
  - b. Paul says that his freedom to eat whatever he wants also means that he is free not to
    - 1) Paul, does that mean that UNITY then more important than the TRUTH?
    - 2) No, but it does mean that UNITY is more important than me getting my way!
  - c. **Note:** Paul never intended this to be the trump card to be used in church fights!
    - 1) **First**, strong are required to give up freedom for weak, not other way around
    - 2) **Second**, freedom is always given up as a gift— it can never ever be demanded.
    - 3) **Third**, this is to keep the weak from stumbling, not the strong from grumbling!

#### IV. Conclusion: Two Final Thoughts

- A. **First**, this text is most often used as ammunition in in the middle of church disputes
  1. Real point here is a plea for unity despite the differences between Jews and Gentiles
  2. But we tend to use this in attempt to get our way and make the other side give in
    - a. "*Paul says that I'm not judged by your conscience; I have liberty in Christ*"
    - b. "*Paul says that you can't do anything that causes me to stumble, so quit!*"
  3. Appeal for us to get along as family is used to beat each other up! *Lord have mercy*
- B. **Second**, Paul is arguing here for a package. This text only works as a total package
  1. We can't just pick out the part that serves our purpose and hit each other with it
    - a. All must refuse to look down on others. We must all not judge each other's motives
    - b. We must all give up control over others. We must all must allow private views.
    - c. We must all we more concerned for the church than about getting our way
  2. Church where all are committed to Christ and to these principles—*impossible to split!*