

Session 14: Welcome One Another

Romans 14:1-15:13 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers how one body handles honest disagreement: in genuinely indifferent matters, the strong bear with the weak, no one despises and no one passes judgment, a certain conscience binds even when mistaken, liberty bows to love, and the table stays open, "welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you." The group also learns the skill of telling indifferent matters from essential ones, which is half of Christian peace.

Catholic Touchstone. Two Catholic teachings anchor the chapter: conscience binds, "a human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience" (CCC 1790), and scandal is real sin, behavior that leads another to do evil (CCC 2284). Between those two truths runs the Church's old wisdom of legitimate diversity within real unity (CCC 814): not everything Catholics differ over is a difference in the faith.

What You Need to Know

Ground the dispute historically before anyone moralizes it. Recall Session 1: Claudius expelled Rome's Jews; the churches became largely Gentile; the Jewish believers came home to communities that had stopped keeping kosher and the calendar. On that reconstruction, the presenting issues are what you would predict: food ("one believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables," 14:2, likely avoiding market meat of doubtful origin) and days (14:5, the sabbaths and feasts). The "weak in faith" (14:1) are not the morally lax but the scrupulous: those whose conscience still binds them to observances; the "strong" know that "nothing is unclean in itself" (14:14). Watch what Paul does and refuses to do: doctrinally he sides with the strong, openly (14:14, 20), and pastorally he binds the strong hardest: welcome, do not despise, do not argue the weak out of their scruples, and never let your liberty "cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died" (14:15). The strong prove their strength by what they can refrain from.

The chapter's spine is a set of sentences your group should carry out the door. Ownership: "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls" (14:4), and "none of us lives to himself... whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (14:7-8). Accountability: "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God... each of us shall give account of himself to God" (14:10, 12), the letter's last echo of chapter 2's judgment. Proportion: "the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14:17). Conscience: "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (14:23), the verse behind the Church's teaching that conscience binds. And the model: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak... For Christ did not please himself" (15:1-3). It all lands at 15:7: "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God": the word that opened the chapter (14:1) closes it, now with its christological warrant. How did Christ welcome you? Then that is the standard.

Two cautions for leading. First, this chapter is about genuinely indifferent matters (the old word is *adiaphora*): observances, foods, customs, styles. It is not a license for treating doctrine or the moral law as matters of taste, and the chapter itself says so from inside (14:17 names righteousness as the kingdom's substance; 14:23 calls faithless action sin); the steelman handles this head-on. Second, the nearest application for most Catholic groups is our own in-house wars over genuinely lawful options: legitimate liturgical preferences among approved forms, devotional styles, fasting practices beyond what the Church requires, how the rosary is or is not prayed. (Matters settled by doctrine or binding discipline, and actual liturgical abuses, are not Romans 14

territory.) Expect the discussion to go there; let it, at the level of principle, and keep 14:3's two verbs in view, because each side has its favorite sin: the strong despise, the weak pass judgment.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalms 69:9. Paul grounds "Christ did not please himself" in the psalter: "The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me" (15:3). Psalm 69 is one of the Passion psalms the apostles reached for repeatedly (zeal for the house, the vinegar). Small honesty note for you: Paul quotes the Greek psalter, so his wording differs slightly from the RSV2CE's Hebrew-based rendering of Ps 69:9 ("the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me"); same verse, two translation streams. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Mark 7:18-19. Paul's boldest sentence, "nothing is unclean in itself" (14:14), which he asserts "in the Lord Jesus," has its warrant in the Lord Jesus: Mark records him declaring "all foods clean." Paul's teaching accords with, and may well transmit, the Lord's own. A discovery passage; guard it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN XXIII

In his first encyclical, *Ad Petri Cathedram*, St. John XXIII commended an old Christian axiom, often repeated though its original author is uncertain: in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity. It is Romans 14 in three clauses. The pope who would open the Second Vatican Council commended it as wisdom for how Catholics disagree: the essentials are not negotiable, the genuinely doubtful are not battlegrounds, and charity is not the third rule but the atmosphere of the other two.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

On the road to his martyrdom around AD 107, St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote ahead to the churches with one anxiety above the wild beasts: their unity. Be careful, he urges, to observe one Eucharist; for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup, one altar, one bishop with his presbyters and deacons (Letter to the Philadelphians 4). Ignatius guards the Eucharistic table; Romans 14's disputed meals are the shared tables of daily fellowship, connected without being identical: a community whose members will not eat together is rehearsing division at the altar. Paul spends a whole chapter keeping the weak and the free at one another's tables. (Welcome at table is not the same question as the Church's conditions for receiving Communion, which this chapter does not address.)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. PHILIP NERI

St. Philip Neri, the sixteenth-century apostle of Rome, teaches in substance, by the life his early biographers (beginning with Bacci) recount, that souls are won with gentleness and joy or usually not at all: he corrected with humor, wore his penances lightly, and refused to crush tender consciences. He is 14:17 in a cassock: the kingdom as righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. A room arguing about observances has forgotten its own atmosphere; St. Philip's instinct in disputes was to lower the temperature and raise the joy.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1790. "A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself." This is 14:23 in catechetical form, and it comes with the duty your group learned in Session 3: conscience binds, and must therefore be formed, since ignorance can be culpable (the surrounding paragraphs say both).

CCC 2284-2285. Scandal: "an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil," which takes on a particular gravity from the authority of those who cause it or the weakness of those who suffer it (CCC 2285); here it lands on the strong. Paul's "do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died" (14:15) is the apostolic form of these paragraphs.

CCC 814. The Church's unity is marked from the beginning by "a great diversity which comes from both the variety of God's gifts and the diversity of those who receive them." Legitimate diversity is not a leak in the ship; sin against unity is; the Catechism names those wounds, heresy, apostasy, and schism, at CCC 817, never differing customs.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

One body: pays off tonight. 12:4-5 ("members one of another") planted it; the welcome-table is where it either becomes real or does not. One connecting sentence.

Judgment seat: last echo. 14:10-12 is chapter 2's judgment (Session 3) heard one final time, now aimed at intra-church judging. Note the symmetry: the letter that began by disarming the judge ends by disarming him again, at the parish potluck.

Root of Jesse: quiet plant. The Dig Deeper catena ends at Isaiah 11:10, "the root of Jesse... in him shall the Gentiles hope," which is 1:3 (descended from David) returning. Plant it without comment; Session 15 harvests the letter's whole frame next week.

Final session prep. Take-Home 14 tells everyone to bring BOTH written answers (the Session 1 original and the Session 8 revision) to the final session. Announce it aloud tonight as well.

Session Goals

1. The group can define the weak and the strong historically and explain why Paul agrees with the strong and binds them hardest.
2. The group discovers Psalm 69:9 and Mark 7:18-19 and can trace "nothing unclean in itself" to the Lord's own declaration.
3. The group can distinguish indifferent matters from essentials, state why a certain conscience binds even when erroneous (14:23; CCC 1790), and name scandal as the strong's characteristic sin.
4. The group applies 14:3's two verbs (despise, condemn) to one honest in-house Catholic example without the room dividing.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 with the Mark discovery: 26 min
- Build question 3 with the Psalm 69 discovery: 17 min

- Steelman chain: 15 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer, and the bring-both-answers announcement: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress 14:5-9 (days; living and dying to the Lord) to two sentences with 14:8 read aloud. Never cut the discoveries or the steelman answer.

Session 14: Welcome One Another

Romans 14:1-15:13 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you welcomed us when we were unwelcomeable; teach us tonight to welcome one another. Guard the essentials in us, loosen our grip on the rest, and pour charity over all of it. Make this group a table where the weak are safe and the strong are gentle, for the glory of your name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. What is a family or household difference (schedules, food, holiday customs) that once caused real friction and now makes you smile? What changed?
2. Where have you seen Christians treat a matter of taste like a matter of faith, or a matter of faith like a matter of taste?

Build

Read Romans 14:1-12 aloud.

1. Identify the two parties and their issues. Then find the two different sins in 14:3: what is the strong man's temptation toward the weak, and the weak man's toward the strong? Which is yours?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The weak in faith keep food scruples and observe days (14:2, 5), on the reading most interpreters favor, Jewish believers (and sympathizers) holding kosher practice and the calendar after the Claudius upheaval (ascetic and market-meat concerns are the main alternatives); the strong eat anything, knowing food is clean. The two sins of 14:3: "let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats." Despising is the strong man's sin: contempt, eye-rolling, treating tender consciences as stupidity. Passing judgment is the weak man's sin (14:3's own verb): making my scruple God's law, with condemnation as its natural escalation. Every in-house Catholic quarrel your group can name runs on these two engines, and each side is usually certain only the other engine exists. Paul's grounds for disarmament: "God has welcomed him" (14:3); "it is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand" (14:4); and "each of us shall give account of himself to God" (14:12): of himself, the pronoun that ends most arguments.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul stakes his boldest claim on the Lord's own authority: 'I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself' (14:14). His teaching matches the Lord's own, given over a dispute about washing and eating. Find the declaration near the end of Mark 7."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Mark 7:18-19: what goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, "since it enters, not his heart but his stomach"; and Mark adds the editorial thunderclap: "Thus he declared all foods clean." So the strong are doctrinally right, and Paul says so in public, twice (14:14, 20): the kosher wall, given for a season, has served its purpose. Now watch what Paul does with being right: he immediately handcuffs it. "It is

unclean for any one who thinks it unclean" (14:14), and "if your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died" (14:15). Being right is not a license; it is a responsibility, and its price is measured at the cross: Christ died for the brother your liberty could flatten. The Church's name for the strong man's failure here is scandal (CCC 2284-2285): conduct that leads another to act against conscience, and "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (14:23), so pressuring a scrupulous brother past his conscience does not free him; it teaches him to sin. A certain judgment of conscience binds even when mistaken (CCC 1790), which is why the path for the weak is formation over time (CCC 1783-1785), never violation tonight.

2. Read 14:17 and weigh it. If the kingdom is not food and drink, what is it? What does this verse do to every dispute about observances, and what does it explicitly NOT relativize?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14:17). It is Paul's proportion-check: observances are servants of the kingdom, not its substance, so a fight about the servants that destroys the substance has lost everything to keep nothing. But read the verse's positive half as closely as its negative: the kingdom is righteousness, so this text cannot be conscripted to relativize the moral law; it relativizes menus, not commandments. And it is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, which means the temperature and atmosphere of a disagreement are themselves theological data: a faction that is right without peace or joy has misplaced the kingdom while defending it.

Read Romans 15:1-13 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "'Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written...'" (15:3). Paul reaches for a psalm the apostles quoted constantly about the Passion, a psalm of zeal and vinegar. Find the verse he cites, in Psalm 69."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Psalm 69:9: "For zeal for thy house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me." (Paul's wording, "the reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me," follows the Greek psalter the apostles used; same verse, two translation streams, worth one honest sentence to the group.) The argument: bearing with the weak has a model, and the model is Calvary: Christ absorbed reproaches that were not his, so the strong can absorb inconveniences that are not theirs. Then the crescendo: welcome one another "as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (15:7), and Christ's welcome reached both rooms of the house: he became "a servant to the circumcised" to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, and opened mercy to the Gentiles (15:8-9), sealed with a four-text catena in which Moses, David, and Isaiah all summon the nations to praise (15:9-12). The dispute about menus dissolves into a choir with two sections singing one hymn. And Paul signs the section with a benediction worth praying over your group verbatim: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (15:13).

Steelman: Is Everything Now a Disputable Matter?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is a reading you will meet everywhere, inside the Church and out, and it deserves its strongest form. Paul, faced with a religious dispute, refuses to legislate: 'let every

one be fully convinced in his own mind' (14:5); each stands before his own master (14:4); who are you to judge? On this reading, Romans 14 is Christianity's declaration of private judgment: sincere conviction is what matters, rules are secondary, and any church that binds consciences on food, days, worship, or, extend the logic, doctrine and morals, has unlearned this chapter. In its strongest confessional form the claim is narrower and sharper: Scripture alone binds the conscience, so in everything Scripture leaves free no church may legislate, and Rome's fasts, feasts, and disciplines are exactly the man-made burdens Paul refuses to impose. Isn't 'fully convinced in his own mind' the death of religious authority?" Let its modern plausibility fill the room. Then press.

3. Press: Three tests from inside the chapter and one from the letter. What kind of matters is Paul handling, and does he treat them as unknowable? What does 14:17 put beyond dispute? What does 14:23 call unfaithful action? And glance ahead: how does Paul treat deviation from "the doctrine which you have been taught" two chapters from now (16:17)?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

First: the chapter's subject matter is observances, foods and days, genuinely indifferent things, and Paul does not treat even these as unknowable: he settles the doctrinal question himself, with authority, "in the Lord Jesus" (14:14). The liberty of 14:5 operates inside a truth an apostle has just defined; private judgment did not draw the boundaries of the dispute, apostolic teaching did, which quietly makes the opposite point: someone must have authority to declare which matters are indifferent, or every faction will promote its preferences to essentials and demote essentials to preferences. (That answers the sharper confessional form too: Romans 14 itself shows an apostle, not the private reader, drawing the line between bound and free; and the Church's disciplines bind as household order under real authority, not as divine law added to the gospel.) Second: 14:17 puts righteousness inside the kingdom's definition; the moral law is not on the menu. Third: 14:23 makes sincerity necessary but not sufficient: acting against conscience is sin, and nothing in the chapter says acting from a malformed conscience is thereby made good, which is why conscience must be formed (Session 3; CCC 1790 and its neighbors). Fourth: the same Paul writes, later in chapter 16 (16:17), "take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them": there is a taught doctrine, it is normative, and departure from it is not a Romans 14 liberty. So the honest synthesis, which is the Church's: in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity, the axiom St. John XXIII approvingly cited in his first encyclical. Romans 14 is the charter of the middle clause, not the abolition of the first. And turn the blade toward our own house before closing: Catholics rarely err today by relativizing food laws; we err by fighting lawful liturgical and devotional options as if they were the Creed. This chapter reads us, both verbs of 14:3 at a time.

DIG DEEPER

The catena's last note (15:12). Paul closes the section with Isaiah: "The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope" (15:12, citing Isa 11:10). Hear the frame clicking shut: the letter opened with the gospel of the Son "descended from David" (1:3), and its argument ends with David's root as the hope of the nations. The scandal Rome's house churches were living, Jews and Gentiles at one table, is not a problem the gospel tolerates; it is the very thing the prophets said the Messiah would produce. Keep this connection in your pocket; next week the letter's first sentence returns in another way, and the group will find it themselves.

Send

1. Which verb of 14:3 is yours, despising or condemning, and toward whom? What would welcoming that person "as Christ has welcomed you" (15:7) cost?
2. Where might your liberty, speech, or example be a stumbling block to someone weaker than you assume? What will you refrain from, for love, this week?

Live It This Week

- Identify one in-house preference you have treated as an essential, and pray for the Catholics on the other side of it, by name if you can, every day this week.
- Do one concrete act of welcome toward a Christian whose style or scruples grate on you: a meal, a message, a seat saved.
- Pray 15:13 over your group and your parish each day: God of hope, fill them with all joy and peace in believing.
- FIND BOTH OF YOUR WRITTEN ANSWERS, the Session 1 sealed guess and the Session 8 revision, AND BRING THEM NEXT WEEK. The final session needs them.

Memory Verse

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

Romans 15:7 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Christ, you did not please yourself; you bore what was not yours and welcomed those who were not worthy, and we are they. Make the strong among us gentle and the scrupulous among us free, and all of us one at your table. May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing. Amen.

Session 14: Welcome One Another

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 14:1-12 (read aloud: weak and strong; despise and condemn; his own master; judgment seat; account of himself)
- Mark 7:18-19 (discovery passage: he declared all foods clean; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 14:13-23 (nothing unclean in itself; ruin of one for whom Christ died; kingdom as righteousness, peace, joy; whatever is not from faith is sin)
- Romans 15:1-13 (read aloud: bear with the weak; Christ did not please himself; welcome one another; the catena; the benediction)
- Psalm 69:9 (discovery passage: the reproaches fell on me; do not reveal in advance; note the Greek-psalter wording)
- Romans 16:17 (steelman text: the doctrine which you have been taught; cited within the press)
- Isaiah 11:10 with Romans 15:12 (Dig Deeper: the root of Jesse; frame with 1:3)
- CCC 1790 (with 1783-1785), 2284-2285, 814, 817 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 15:7. ANNOUNCE: bring both written answers next week.