



SERMON GUIDE

When You Don't See Eye to Eye

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Introduction

To this day, I remember the first summer I came home from college. As I walked up to our front door, my father didn't welcome me with a hug or even a "Good to see you." Instead, he met me with three blunt words: "Get a haircut," though my hair barely touched my ears. My father had an unbending belief that a man's hair should never be too long. For the first time in my life, I stood my ground. I reminded him of my good grades, my solid reputation, and how I'd never given him a minute's trouble. Trembling, I told him if he meant what he said, I'd find another place to live that summer. Thankfully, my mother intervened, but that day revealed a powerful truth: Even people who love each other deeply can disagree profoundly over matters of personal preference.

In today's highly-charged culture, disagreement is inevitable—especially when it comes to politics, social issues, and personal choices. Romans 14 addresses this very challenge faced by the early church, where Jewish and Gentile believers clashed over food choices and holy days. The principles Paul taught them apply to our own struggles. When it comes to the gray areas of life—those issues where Scripture isn't explicitly clear—we must be free to disagree without making it “all about me.” These principles will help you maintain unity even when you don't see eye to eye.

Key Points

1. Accept Others for Being Themselves

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables (Romans 14:1-2, NIV).

In the early church, Jewish Christians would not eat pork or shellfish because of their Jewish heritage and dietary laws in Leviticus naming those animals as unclean (see Leviticus 11). But Gentile Christians had grown up eating everything. The

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3. Affirm Others to Live as Themselves

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Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister (Romans 14:13, NIV).

After addressing the weaker believers who tend toward legalism, Paul turns to the stronger believers who might abuse their freedom. You may have the right to eat what you want and drink what you want, but if exercising those freedoms causes another believer to violate their conscience, you're no longer acting in love. Love limits liberty. The stronger believer should be more concerned about loving the weaker Christian than exercising the limits of their freedom.

For example, I personally don't drink and never will, but I don't stand in judgment of people who do. That's just my preference. If I condemned others for drinking, I'd become the weaker brother. I can't shove my personal preference down someone's throat. But if you're having dinner with a recovering alcoholic, love would limit your liberty to drink, not because drinking itself is wrong but because it could cause someone to stumble.

Love limits liberty. Be more concerned about building others up than exercising your own freedom.

4. Avoid Causing Others to Harm Themselves

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification (Romans 14:19, NIV).

We should be peacemakers, not peace breakers. We're not in the demolition business; we're in the construction business! Most Christians ask, "Who is right?" when they should ask, "What is right?" When Scripture is silent on an issue, Paul gives us this principle: "So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God" (v. 22, NIV). If the Lord



convicts you that something is wrong, don't do it—even if every other Christian is doing it. If it's not from faith, it's sin. It's like my wife always says, "If it's doubtful, it's dirty." Before making any decision in a gray area, ask yourself: Will this unite or divide? Will this help or hurt? Will it build a bridge or a barrier? Will it draw people to Jesus or drive people away?

When in doubt, don't. Your goal should always be to draw people toward Jesus, not push them away.

Key Takeaway

God wants us together, not identical. Accept others as He does, let Him be their judge, and don't cause others to stumble. Our joy comes from Jesus, not from our preferences or politics. He stays in charge no matter what.

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Reflection Questions:

1. In what “gray areas” have you been tempted to judge others whose convictions differ from yours? How could you better accept them while maintaining your own convictions?

2. Which disputable issue creates the most tension in your relationships with other believers? How can Romans 14 help you maintain unity without compromising your convictions?

3. Of the four questions to ask yourself before acting—Will this unite or divide? Help or hurt? Build bridges or barriers? Draw people to Jesus or drive them away?—which one challenges you most and why?
