

Sermon Starter – The Early Church, Our Church: Rome

Romans 14:1-12, 15:1-7

The church in Rome is likely founded by the visitors from Rome who had been present at Pentecost (Acts 2:10). Most of the Roman believers in the early years are Jews. In AD 49, however, Emperor Claudius expels all the Jews from Rome following Jewish riots there. This leaves only the Gentile Christians, who do not share the (formerly majority) Jewish Christian concerns about foods, circumcision, and Jewish holy days. Also, the Gentile Christians have no way of knowing when—or if—the Jewish Christians will ever return to Rome. Leaving aside ritual concerns that they do not share doesn't seem like a bad thing for the Gentile Christians to do. During the five years until Nero becomes emperor and allows the Jews' return, many changes occur in the Roman church. The Jewish believers are aghast at what they find when they return.

The Romans text addresses this situation. Paul does not advocate for complete relativism. He emphasizes that decisions need to be made so that God may be honored through our actions. And each person *will* be accountable to God in the end. What Paul does want is for the Roman church to be united in its goal of glorifying God (Romans 15:6).

Paul tells the Romans to start with the premise that other believers who hold opposing views do so because they are convinced that they are honoring God.

How can adopting this premise (that people who disagree with us are seeking God's honor in their actions) change how we enter into discernment in our churches?

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