

## HORIZONTAL GRACE

### Romans 12:9-17

**Introduction:** Vertical grace is from God downward to us, undeserved, of course. Horizontal grace is from us to each other. Now, do we give undeserved grace to each other as God gives it to us or are we more "conservative?"

1. Why we can't we treat each other as Jesus commands us to? To love without hypocrisy, to be devoted to each other, to honor each other, to contribute to each other's needs, to practice hospitality, to applaud each other's success and luxuries enjoyed?

Why do we pay back evil for evil, knowing that friendships will be lost and barriers erected? Why can't we let others just be themselves?

We compare ourselves with others which leads us to criticize or compete with them.

We are uneasy with differences, those who think differently, choose different things, like different entertainment, clothing styles, tastes or opinions, or a different life style.

We compare musical tastes, financial incomes, marital status, spirituality on the basis of "externals." Why can't others be different? Who says their way is not as good as our way? Where does it say in the Bible that we're all to be the same? It was never God's intention for everyone to look alike or act alike. Look at the different characters God used throughout the Bible.

- The Church is not supposed to burn out mass-produced reproductions like an assembly line. The Church isn't a spiritual cookie-cutter.

Comparison fuels the fire of envy. It prompts the tendency to judge, it makes prejudiced people.

God has made each of us as we are. He is hard at work shaping us into the image He has in mind, Jesus Christ.

He wants each one of us to be unique. There is only ONE YOU and ONE ME.

2. We also have the tendency to CONTROL each other. ("If I were you, I'd.....")

We try to get our way by manipulating and intimidating. We use fear tactics, threats and hints to get our way.

We are uneasy with others being as free as we are, so we try to force our way upon each other.

So, how do we go about letting each other be each other?

### I. ACCEPT OTHERS, LET THEM BE THEMSELVES (*Romans 14:1-4*)

1. The real problem in the text is not the food, IT IS A LOVE PROBLEM, an ACCEPTANCE problem.

- We restrict our love by making it conditional. If you will - or won't, then I will accept you.  
(Be like me, act like me, and I'll accept you)

2. We disagree with others over just about anything:

- movies, dinners, clothes, make-up, jewelry, television programs, kind of car/truck, music, jobs, hair styles, tatoos, house styles, country or city living, shorts, tights, shoe styles, etc.

3. Who are we to judge another?

- When we truly accept another person, we remember that the Lord is perfectly capable of directing that person's life. THAT should relieve us of having to do it! It's our job to accept each other. IT'S GOD'S JOB TO DIRECT THEM....NOT OURS...

- Acceptance means people are valuable just as they are. It allows them to be the real them,

- not forced into our mold.
- Acceptance means we can try out our own ideas without being put down. No one will pronounce judgment on us if we don't agree.
  - Acceptance means we are safe to be ourselves and no one will destroy us out of prejudice.

## **II. NOT BOSSING OTHERS ALLOWS THE LORD FREEDOM TO DIRECT THEIR LIVES** *(Romans 14:5-8)*

1. We must give people space to make up their own minds. We don't need to be stepping in and telling others how or what or when. Let them alone, don't try to control or manipulate them to get what YOU want.
2. Most Christians have a long way to go when it comes to letting the Lord direct the lives of others. We need to remember that WE are the Lord's, each one of us belongs to the same Lord.

## **III. LETTING OTHERS ALONE SHOWS WE'RE NOT QUALIFIED TO DIRECT ANYBODY** *(Romans 14:9-12)*

1. Face it! We're not qualified in any way. We lack full knowledge, jump to wrong conclusions, make judgment statements, only to find out how far off we were.
2. What keeps us from being qualified to judge others?
  - We don't begin to know all the facts, unable to read real motives, impossible to be totally objective, lack the total picture, have blind spots, are prejudiced, and have blurred perspectives, but MOST OF ALL, we, ourselves, are IMPERFECT and INCONSISTENT.
3. Of 53 residents who signed a petition to stop wreckless driving in their neighborhood, a week later 5 violators had been arrested - all 5 had signed the petition.
  - How many sleep during a worship service? How many of them were up all night working? How many are taking medication that makes them drowsy. How many of them were up most of the night with an older senior family member or a small sick child or a baby?
  - How many of you here right now have not been guilty of misjudging someone?
  - We will not always agree with everybody on everything, but we must still let each other be free to agree or disagree....we are not qualified to judge anybody.
  - God, alone is to be judge.

## **CONCLUSION: (Romans 14:19)**

1. Dwell on things that encourage peace and assist each other's growth. Ask, "is this going to make waves or is it going to encourage peace? Is this going to hurt and offend or will it help and strengthen?"
2. Remember that "looking down" on others hurts the work of God - in you and in others. God intends for us all to be different - LET IT HAPPEN..
3. Don't force others to think or act like you. Let them be different, let them be themselves.
4. Determine where you stand and refuse to play God in anybody's life. Let others be themselves and pay attention to what God is trying to say and make of you.