

Keener Romans Session14 Podcast

Okay, so you found some really interesting stuff this time about respecting different customs in the early church. Yeah, this is some pretty fascinating stuff. Looks like we're going deep into Dr. Craig Keener's lecture notes on Romans chapters 14 and 15.

We're going to be uncovering how early Christians in a really diverse group navigated their differences. Especially when it came to things like food and holy days. Yeah, those are some big ones.

It's kind of mind-blowing to think that even back then they were wrestling with these same issues of how to live out their faith in a diverse community. It's one of those things that makes you realize that these challenges we face, they aren't new at all. And maybe there's some wisdom we can learn from how they navigated them.

Yeah, absolutely. And what's really interesting to me is that even in a letter as theologically rich as Romans, the practical application of love and respect really takes center stage. It's like Paul is saying, hey, all this deep theology is great, but if you're not living it out in how you treat each other, what's the point? What's the point? These weren't abstract theological debates either.

They were real everyday challenges faced by these early Christian communities. Should they eat meat that had been offered to idols? Yeah, that's a big one. Should they observe the Sabbath? Things that could easily cause division if they weren't handled carefully? Exactly.

And what's fascinating is that Paul is writing this letter from Corinth. Oh, wow. Where he had already addressed similar issues about food offered to idols in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Oh, it was an ongoing... It seems like these questions of conscience and community are ongoing challenges. It's like that friend who gives you advice, and then you find yourself in the same situation again later. No way.

Just with different details. Yeah, different details, same principle. It makes you wonder what Paul would say about some of our modern debates.

Oh, absolutely. Right. I mean, that's what makes studying these ancient texts so compelling.

They offer this timeless wisdom for navigating the complexities of just living in community. Yeah, even today. Yeah.

Okay, so let's unpack this a bit further. Right. One thing that really struck me was Keener's emphasis on this warning against judging others.

Yes. Especially in Romans 14. Yeah, Paul repeatedly cautions against judging.

Yeah. Particularly around food customs. It's almost like Paul is saying, who are you to judge someone else's choices? Right.

God is the ultimate judge, not us. And Keener even points out that analogy that Paul uses of judging another person's servant. Right.

It's simply not our place. It's not our place, yeah. Yeah.

This really hits home, right? It does. Think about a time when you felt judged for your beliefs or practices. How did that make you feel? Yeah.

Paul's words here challenge us to approach disagreements differently. Totally. Instead of trying to win.

Maybe it's more about trying to understand where the other person is coming from. Yeah. I think that's a huge part of it.

Right. To approach those differences with humility and grace. Absolutely.

Recognizing that God is the final arbiter of our actions. Yeah. We're all servants in his household.

It's not our place to judge one another. Okay. Now things get interesting when Keener tackles this question of holy days.

Okay. He mentions Roman festivals, market days, but he says that most likely refers to Jewish customs. Right.

Like Sabbath observance. This is where that historical context is so key. Yeah.

Because the Sabbath was a significant point of contention, even among different Jewish groups. Right. At the time.

Yeah. Instead of getting lost in all those different arguments though. Yeah.

Keener shares a personal story. He does. About how he, as like a busy scholar, had to kind of relearn the importance of rest.

He was a doctoral student at the time. Oh, wow. Constantly pushing himself.

Yeah. Working late into the night. Burning the candle at both ends.

You know? Yeah. And he realized that he needed to intentionally carve out time for rest. Yeah.

Even if it meant like setting aside work for a full 24 hours. I wonder, have you ever felt that pressure? Oh yeah. To be on all the time? Absolutely.

Maybe this whole debate about the Sabbath challenges us to think about what our modern day Sabbath looks like. That's a good point. Those times we intentionally set aside to recharge and to connect with something bigger than ourselves.

You know, Paul doesn't give us like a black and white answer about which day to observe. Right. But he pushes us to examine our own assumptions.

Yeah. About rest and how we honor God in our lives. And even in the early church, there wasn't complete agreement on these matters.

There wasn't, no. Some Christians continued to observe the Sabbath on Saturday. Right.

Others shifted to Sunday worship. And some even observed both days. It's interesting.

It's a reminder that unity doesn't necessarily mean uniformity. No, it doesn't. We can have different practices and beliefs yet still come together in love and worship.

Yeah, that's a beautiful thing. What stands out to you about this whole debate on the Sabbath? Does it change how you think about rest in your own life? I think for me, it highlights the importance of being mindful of our own need for rest and respecting how others choose to honor God in their practices. Yeah.

Even if they differ from our own. And ultimately, Keener points out that for Paul, these disagreements weren't really about food or specific days. Right.

It was about expressing faith and serving Christ. It always comes back to that. He gets to the heart of the matter when he quotes Paul.

The kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking. Yeah. But the kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Which beautifully connects to Paul's emphasis on living by the Spirit. Yeah. Not just following external rules.

It's like Paul is saying, look, you can follow all the rules about food and rituals. Right. But if you're not living out a life of love and joy, what's the point? It's about an inner transformation, not just outward actions.

Have you ever experienced that tension between knowing the right thing to do? Oh, yeah. And actually living it out? I think we all have. It's about allowing the Spirit to transform our hearts and bear fruit in our lives.

Yeah, absolutely. And Keener highlights how this concept of righteousness had been like a central theme throughout Romans. It is.

It's woven throughout. So it's not just about following a set of rules. It's about embodying God's character.

Yeah. Which is something the Holy Spirit empowers us to do. And this righteousness is like inextricably linked to peace and joy.

Yeah. Peace in the sense of like relational harmony, not just the absence of conflict. And joy that springs from our trust in God, a deep abiding sense of contentment and gratitude.

It's not about suppressing our emotions or pretending everything's perfect. Right. It's about allowing the Spirit to cultivate those fruits in our lives.

Yeah. Even amidst challenges and disagreements. And Keener points out how Paul uses that word joy alongside peace.

Yes. Which is significant. It is.

Because the same Paul who calls for joy also acknowledges his own continual sorrow in Romans 9. Yeah, it's really interesting. So it suggests that joy and sorrow aren't mutually exclusive. No.

We can experience both. We can. And yet still be anchored in the peace and hope that comes from the Holy Spirit.

Right. It's not about achieving some kind of emotional perfection. Yeah.

It's about allowing the Spirit to work in and through us, even in our brokenness and pain. So how does this tie back to the issue of respecting differences? That's a good question. Like what's the connection that Keener makes between living by the Spirit and how we treat one another? Well, he emphasizes that true service to Christ isn't about obsessing over dietary restrictions.

Right. Or debating, you know, the finer points of Sabbath observance. Yeah.

It's about cultivating a Spirit-filled character that naturally flows out in love, peace, and unity, even amidst our differences. And he draws a parallel to the Old Testament idea of God building up his people. Right.

Not tearing them down. Yeah. It's language that Paul echoes throughout his letters, urging believers to build each other up and seek the good of one another.

And Keener highlights how this idea of building up isn't just about avoiding conflict. Right. It's about actively working for the well-being of our fellow believers, even if it means making sacrifices for their sake.

He even quotes Paul saying that he would abstain from meat and wine. Yeah. If it meant preventing a brother or sister from stumbling in their faith.

It's pretty radical. He's willing to go to extremes. He is.

To protect the unity and spiritual growth of the community. It raises an interesting point about the context of Paul's words. What do you mean? Well, he wasn't simply addressing personal preferences or minor disagreements.

Oh, okay. He was dealing with issues that could potentially lead someone away from Christ. So it's a different kind of... It's like the difference between saying, I don't really like that music and saying that music is leading people astray.

Oh, yeah. The stakes are much higher in the latter case. Exactly.

And Keener reminds us that for Paul, the ultimate question was whether our actions were motivated by faith and love for God. He quotes Romans 14.23, whatever is not from faith is sin. That's a challenging statement.

It is. It forces us to examine our own motives. Right.

Like, are we acting out of genuine love for God and others, or are we driven by self-righteousness or a desire to control? It's about discerning the difference between standing up for truth and simply imposing our own preferences on others. And Keener emphasizes that this discernment requires humility. Absolutely.

And a willingness to consider the perspectives of those who might be weaker in their faith. Yeah. It's about being sensitive to their consciences and not causing them to stumble.

He uses that example of Paul's willingness to adapt to different cultural contexts. Right. Becoming all things to all people for the sake of the gospel.

It's about finding that balance between upholding our convictions and meeting people where they are. And Keener provides some interesting insights into the historical context. Oh, does he? Of Paul's statement about abstaining from meat and wine.

He talks about how wine in that era was typically watered down. Really? And the potential for drunkenness was much lower than in later centuries. Oh, interesting.

When distillation techniques allowed for much stronger alcohol content. It's a reminder that we need to be careful. Yeah.

About imposing our modern day sensibilities onto ancient texts. For sure. What might seem like an extreme statement today.

Right. Could have been a much more commonplace practice in Paul's time. Yeah, absolutely.

He also talks about how cultural norms around food and drink can vary widely. They do. And how what might be considered offensive in one culture could be perfectly acceptable in another.

He even shares this funny anecdote about his wife who's from Congo being served raw oysters in France. Oh, no. And being unable to eat them because she could feel them wiggling as they went down.

Oh, my goodness. It's a lighthearted example that illustrates the importance of being culturally sensitive. Yeah.

And recognizing that our own experiences and preferences aren't universal. Paul's point wasn't to create like a rigid set of rules about food and drink. Right.

But to encourage believers to be mindful of how their actions might affect others. It's about putting love and unity above personal preferences. And he reminds us that even in the early church, there were debates and disagreements about these matters.

Absolutely. And that Paul's goal was to find a way for Christians to live together in harmony despite their differences. And he even points out that the term brothers.

Oh, interesting. In the Greek text of Romans often encompasses both men and women. So it wasn't just... Suggesting that Paul's call for unity applied to the entire community.

Yeah. Regardless of gender. It's a reminder that the principles of love and respect that Paul lays out.

Right. Are meant to be lived out in all our relationships, not just between men and women. That's an important point.

And Keener highlights how Paul grounds his exhortation for unity in the example of Christ. Yes. Who willingly served both Jews and Gentiles, breaking down barriers.

Right. And welcoming all into God's kingdom. He quotes Romans 15.7, Accept one another as Christ accepted us.

Now that's a powerful reminder. It is. That our unity is rooted in the love and grace that we have received from Christ.

And think about the radical inclusivity of that statement. Wow. Yeah.

Christ accepted us in all our brokenness, our flaws, our disagreements. He didn't wait for us to get our act together. He didn't.

Before extending his love and grace. No, he didn't. And Keener draws a parallel.

Right. Between Christ's self-sacrificial service and Paul's willingness to give up even things as basic as meat and wine for the sake of his fellow believers. It's about prioritizing the needs of others above our own desires and preferences.

It really is. And this self-sacrificial love isn't just about giving up material things. Right.

It's about cultivating a spirit of humility and understanding. Right. A willingness to listen to and learn from those who might see things differently than we do.

And recognizing that we are all part of the same body, united in Christ. Yeah. And that our differences, when approached with love and respect, can actually enrich and strengthen the community.

Keener emphasizes that this unity doesn't require us to agree on everything. No, it doesn't. He acknowledges that there will always be differences of opinion and practice within the church.

Right. Like we're not all going to see eye to eye on every single issue. But he also highlights how Paul repeatedly calls for unity in worship.

Yeah. Encouraging believers to come together and glorify God with one voice. Even if their theological perspectives or cultural backgrounds differ.

He cites Romans 15.6. So that with one mind and one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's about finding that common ground. Yeah.

In our shared love for God. Right. And our desire to honor Him.

And Keener points out that this unity in worship doesn't require us to suppress our individual personalities. Right. Or stifle our creativity.

Yeah. It's about finding ways to express our love for God. Yeah.

In ways that are both authentic to who we are and harmonious with the larger community. He even suggests that the diversity of expressions within the church can actually enhance our worship. Oh, I love that.

Creating a richer and more vibrant tapestry of praise and adoration. It's like a choir where each voice contributes its unique tone and timbre. Beautiful analogy.

Yeah. To create a harmonious whole. Exactly.

And Keener reminds us that this unity and diversity is a reflection of the very nature of God. Who created us in His image with a beautiful array of differences. And he cites Romans 15.1 to 2. Right.

Where Paul urges believers to bear with one another in love. And to please our neighbor for his good to build him up. It's about recognizing that our differences, when handled with grace and humility, can actually serve to strengthen and encourage one another.

And Keener highlights how Paul grounds this exhortation in the example of Christ. Yeah. Who did not please himself, but came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

He quotes Romans 15.3. For even Christ did not please himself. But as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. It's a reminder that true unity requires a spirit of selflessness and sacrifice.

A willingness to put the needs of others above our own desires and preferences. And this self-sacrificial love isn't just about grand gestures or heroic acts. No, it's not.

It's about the everyday choices we make to put others first. Yeah. To listen attentively, to speak words of encouragement, and to extend forgiveness and grace.

It's about creating a culture of love and respect within the community. Yeah. Where differences are seen as opportunities for growth and understanding rather than sources of division and conflict.

And Keener emphasizes that this kind of unity isn't something that we can achieve on our own. We can't. It's not a matter of willpower.

It's a gift from God. It is. It's a reminder that we need to rely on God's grace and guidance to cultivate true unity within the church.

Absolutely. And this unity isn't just about feeling good or getting along. Right.

It's about reflecting the character of God to the world. Yeah. Demonstrating the power of his love to transform lives and bring people together.

Keener cites Romans 15.9, Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles and sing to your name. It's about using our unity as a platform for sharing the good news of the gospel with those who don't yet know Christ. And this missional focus isn't just about preaching or evangelism.

Right. It's about living out the gospel in tangible ways, demonstrating love, compassion, and justice to a world that desperately needs to see the reality of God's kingdom. It's about being a beacon of hope in a world that is often filled with division, strife, and despair.

And Keener reminds us that this call to unity isn't just for the early church. No, it's not. It's a timeless principle that applies to every generation of believers.

He cites Romans 15.4, For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. It's a reminder that the Bible is a living and active word. That continues to speak to us today, guiding us in our relationships.

And empowering us to live out the gospel in a way that honors God and blesses others. And Keener concludes this section of his lecture notes by highlighting how Paul supports his call for unity by citing examples from the Old Testament. Oh, interesting.

Demonstrating that God's plan for salvation has always included both Jews and Gentiles. He quotes Romans 15.9 to 12, As it is written, Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles and sing to your name. And again, it is said, Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.

And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him. And again, Isaiah says, The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles in him, will the Gentiles hope. It's a powerful reminder that the church is meant to be a diverse and inclusive community.

Yeah. Reflecting the vastness of God's love and the universality of his grace. And Keener challenges us to consider how we can live out this vision of unity in our own time and context.

Yeah. Recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities that we face. He encourages us to approach our differences with humility and grace.

Seeking to understand rather than to judge and to build one another up in love. Always remembering that our unity is rooted in the love and grace that we have received from Christ. And he leaves us with this final thought-provoking question.

What is it? What are the foods or holy days that we argue about today? That's a good one to ponder. It is, isn't it? Yeah, it really is. It's a brilliant question.

Yeah. Because it forces us to look beyond the surface level of those ancient debates. Right.

Because on the one hand, we might think, Oh, we're so much more enlightened now. Right. We don't care about what people eat.

Yeah. But then you start thinking about it. Exactly.

What are those things that trip us up? Yeah. Where do we get caught up in judging or feeling judged, even if it's not about literal food? Keener doesn't give specific modern day examples. Right.

But if we're applying Paul's principles, maybe it's less about the specific issue and more about the attitude behind it. I think you're spot on there. Paul keeps hammering home this idea that it's not about the external rule, but the internal transformation.

So it's not that having convictions is bad. No. But it's when we become so rigid that we can't see another person's perspective, or we make them feel like they're less of a Christian if they don't see it our way.

And the holy days could be anything we treat as sacred. Oh, interesting. Even if it's not a literal day on the calendar.

Okay. Maybe it's our political views. Right.

Our parenting style. Yeah. Our approach to social issues.

Oh, I think that's where it gets really interesting because then we have to ask ourselves, Okay, if I'm going to apply Romans 14 and 15- Right. To these modern day foods and holy days. What does that actually look like? Yeah.

Well, first, I think it calls for a healthy dose of self-awareness. Okay. What are my secret cows, so to speak? Where am I most prone to judge or feel judged? And then maybe the next step is trying to understand the heart behind the other person's conviction.

Yeah. Why is this so important to them? What's their reasoning, even if I don't agree with their conclusion? And that's where humility comes in, right? Because it's easy to dismiss someone's viewpoint if we haven't taken the time to truly understand where they're coming from. Keener talks about how Paul was willing to become all things to all people for the sake of the gospel.

Yeah, that's a powerful example. Obviously, we can't compromise on core truths. Right.

But maybe it means being willing to meet people where they are, to build relationships, even if we don't agree on every single issue. That's a beautiful example of love in action. Yeah.

It's not about pretending our differences don't exist. Right. But about finding ways to connect on a deeper level, to focus on what unites us rather than what divides us.

And that's something Paul emphasizes throughout these chapters, this call for unity. He does. He even quotes that beautiful passage in Romans 15, accept one another as Christ accepted us.

And think about the radical inclusivity of that statement. Christ accepted us in all our brokenness, our flaws, our disagreements. He didn't wait for us to get our act together.

He did. Before extending his love and grace. So maybe the takeaway for us is that true unity isn't about achieving some kind of perfect ideological alignment.

Right. It's about embodying that same spirit of acceptance and love that we've received from Christ. And that's not always easy.

It's not. Especially in today's world where everything feels so polarized and divisive. Yeah.

It's tough. It takes intentionality. It does.

It takes humility. Yeah. It takes a willingness to step outside our comfort zones and engage with those who might see things differently than we do.

But I think that's precisely the challenge Keener is laying before us. Yeah. It's not enough to just understand these principles intellectually.

Right. We have to put them into practice to live them out in our everyday interactions. Yeah.

Even when it's difficult. Because ultimately that's how we demonstrate the authenticity of our faith. It is.

It's not about winning arguments or proving ourselves right. It's about reflecting the love and grace of Christ in a world that desperately needs to see it. I love that.

So what does this look like practically? Good question. If I'm trying to apply these principles to my own life, are there any specific things Keener points to that could help me navigate these food and holy day disagreements in a more Christ-like way? I'm glad you asked. Yeah.

Keener actually gives some really helpful practical tips. Oh, good. Drawn straight from Paul's teachings in Romans.

Okay. For starters, he highlights the importance of avoiding judgment. Okay.

That one sounds pretty straightforward. Don't judge. But how do we actually do that? That's the question, isn't it? Especially when we feel strongly about something.

That's where the rubber meets the road. Yeah. It's easy to say don't judge in theory.

Right. But much harder to put it into practice when we're faced with something that challenges our convictions. Exactly.

And social media doesn't make it any easier. Oh, no. It feels like everyone's got an opinion and they're not afraid to share it.

No, they're not. Keener actually anticipates that very challenge, even though he's obviously writing long before the internet. It's interesting how these ancient texts speak to our modern context.

Yeah, it really is. He points out that Paul isn't advocating for some kind of passive tolerance. Oh, okay.

Where we just shrug and say, whatever, everyone's entitled to their opinion. So it's not about abandoning our convictions or pretending that truth doesn't matter. Precisely.

Keener highlights how Paul himself was fiercely passionate about defending the truth of the gospel. But he also recognized that there's a difference between speaking truth and judging hearts. Okay, so how do we distinguish between the two? That's the million dollar question.

How do we know when we're crossing the line from speaking truth to judging someone's motives or character? That's where things get nuanced. Yeah. And Keener encourages us to approach this with a spirit of humility and self-reflection.

Okay. He reminds us that we are all prone to bias, to seeing things through our own limited perspectives. So before we jump to conclusions about someone else's motives, we need to check our own hearts.

Exactly. Are we coming to this conversation with a genuine desire to understand? Yeah. Or are we primarily focused on proving ourselves right? Are we listening to truly hear the other person's perspective? Oh, that's a good one.

Or are we just waiting for our turn to speak? Those are some tough questions. They are. It's like holding a mirror up to ourselves and asking, am I being the kind of person I want others to be? And that's where the transformative power of the Holy Spirit comes in.

It's not about mustering up some kind of superhuman willpower to avoid judgment. Right. It's about allowing the spirit to shape our humps, to cultivate within us the fruits of love, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

So it's an ongoing process, a journey of sanctification. It is. Where we're constantly being refined and molded into the image of Christ.

And that's good news. It is. Because it means that even if we mess up, even if we find ourselves slipping into judgmental attitudes, we can always turn to God for forgiveness and grace and ask him to help us do better next time.

It's like that verse in Philippians. Yeah. He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Beautiful and Keener emphasizes that this process of sanctification isn't just for our own benefit. Oh, okay. It's for the sake of the community, for the sake of building unity and demonstrating the love of Christ to the world.

So it's not just about cleaning up our own act. Right. It's about creating a culture of grace and understanding within the church.

Yeah. A place where people feel safe to disagree, to wrestle with difficult questions and to grow in their faith without fear of judgment. That's beautiful.

And that's where Keener's second practical tip comes in. Okay. He highlights Paul's exhortation to pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Romans 14.19. That sounds like a tall order. It does, doesn't it? Especially when we're talking about those hot button issues that tend to divide people. Yeah.

How do we pursue peace when it feels like everyone's digging in their heels and refusing to budge? Well, it starts with a shift in perspective. Okay. A willingness to see disagreement not as a battle to be won.

Oh, interesting. But as an opportunity for growth and understanding. So instead of trying to convince the other person that they're wrong.

Right. We're trying to understand why they hold the beliefs they do. And that requires a posture of humility.

A willingness to acknowledge that we might not have all the answers. Right. That we might even learn something from the other person's perspective.

It's about putting relationship above being right. Yeah. About valuing the person more than winning the argument.

And that's not to say that truth doesn't matter. Right. Keener's very clear that Paul wasn't advocating for some kind of wishy-washy relativism where all beliefs are equally valid.

So how do we hold on to our convictions while still pursuing peace and unity? How do we navigate that tension? Keener suggests that it starts with discerning what is essential to the faith. Okay. And what is a matter of personal conviction.

So the essentials would be those core doctrines. Yes. That are clearly articulated in scripture.

Like the deity of Christ. Right. The trinity, the authority of the Bible.

Exactly. Those are the non-negotiables. Yeah.

The foundational truths upon which the entire Christian faith rests. Right. But then there are other areas where scripture might not be as explicit.

Okay. Or where there's room for different interpretations. Like those food and holy day issues we were talking about earlier.

Precisely. Yeah. And in those areas, Keener encourages us to approach our disagreements with a spirit of charity and humility.

Recognizing that faithful Christians might come to different conclusions. So instead of assuming that someone who disagrees with us is automatically wrong or unspiritual. Right.

We give them the benefit of the doubt. Yeah. And try to understand their reason.

And that's where good communication comes in. Yeah. It's not about avoiding difficult conversations.

Right. Or pretending that our differences don't exist. Yeah.

It's about finding ways to talk about those differences respectfully. Listening attentively to the other person's perspective. Right.

And seeking to find common ground even where we disagree. It's like that verse in Proverbs. Yeah.

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Perfectly put. And Keener highlights how Paul emphasizes the importance of not putting a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother or sister.

Romans 14.12. So it's not just about avoiding outright judgment or condemnation. No, it's not. It's about being mindful of how our words and actions might affect others.

Yeah. Especially those who might be weaker in their faith. Right.

Or who come from a different background. And this requires a certain level of self-awareness and empathy. Yeah.

We need to be able to step outside our own perspectives and consider how our behavior might be perceived by others, even if our intentions are good. It's like that golden rule. Yeah.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Exactly. And Keener points out that this principle doesn't mean that we have to compromise our convictions.

Right. Or abandon our beliefs. It simply means that we express those convictions in a way that is loving, respectful, and sensitive to the needs of others.

And sometimes that might mean choosing to remain silent, to refrain from expressing an opinion that might cause someone else to stumble, even if we feel strongly about it. Right. Yeah.

It's easy to get caught up in wanting to have the last word. It is. But Keener reminds us that for Paul, the ultimate goal wasn't about winning arguments or proving ourselves right.

Right. It was about building up the body of Christ and glorifying God. Absolutely.

And sometimes that means putting the needs of others. Yeah. Above our own desire to be heard.

Or to have the last word. Or to have the last word. Exactly.

It's about finding that balance between speaking truth and pursuing peace, between holding on to our convictions and extending grace to those who might disagree. And that's not an easy balance to strike. It's not.

But it's essential if we want to create a community where people feel loved, accepted, and valued. Yeah. Regardless of their background or beliefs.

Because ultimately the unity of the church is such a powerful testimony to the world. Yeah. Of the transformative power of the gospel.

It really is. It's a sign that God's love is strong enough to overcome even our deepest divisions and disagreements. And as Keener reminds us, this unity is not something that we can achieve on our own.

No, we can't. It's a gift from God. It is.

Made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us. So we need to be praying for God's grace to help us live out these principles. Yeah.

In our own lives and in our relationships with others. We need to be asking God to give us hearts of humility, love, and understanding. To help us see others through his eyes.

Yeah. And to treat them with the same compassion and grace that he has shown to us. We need to be willing to put in the hard work.

Yeah. Of building bridges, of having those difficult conversations. Yeah.

Of seeking to understand rather than to judge. Because ultimately, the unity of the church is not just a nice ideal. No, it's not.

It's a vital part of our witness to the world. And a reflection of the very nature of God himself. It really is.

It makes you wonder, what would it look like for us to really embody these principles? Oh. In our everyday lives. Keener gives a really compelling example from Paul's life.

Okay. He reminds us that Paul, despite being a staunch defender of his own Jewish heritage. Right.

Was also incredibly sensitive to the cultural context in which he was ministering. So he was willing to adapt his own practices and customs for the sake of the gospel. He was, he became all things to all people.

Right. So that he might win some. And this wasn't some kind of superficial act either.

No, it wasn't. Keener points out that Paul genuinely sought to understand and connect with those from different backgrounds. He did.

Even when their customs or beliefs differed from his own. It's like he was saying, look, my primary goal isn't to prove that my culture is superior. Right.

Or that my way of doing things is the only right way. My goal is to share the love of Christ. Yeah.

And that means meeting people where they are and speaking their language. Both literally and figuratively. Exactly.

Keener highlights how this principle is especially relevant. Yeah. In a diverse and multicultural society like ours.

It is. We are constantly interacting with people from different backgrounds, different cultures, different belief systems. And if we're going to be effective in sharing the gospel.

Right. We need to be able to do so in a way that is both sensitive and relevant to those we're trying to reach. That doesn't mean compromising our convictions.

Right. Or watering down the truth. It simply means presenting the truth.

Yeah. In a way that is understandable and relatable to those who might not share our background or perspective. It's about building bridges instead of walls finding common ground.

Yeah. And establishing relationships that allow us to speak into each other's lives with authenticity and respect. And that's one of the most powerful takeaways from Keener's lecture notes for me.

I think so too. It's not enough to simply understand these principles intellectually. Right.

We need to embody them. Exactly. To make them a part of who we are.

Yeah. And how we live in the world. It's about cultivating a spirit of humility.

Mm-hmm. A willingness to listen and learn from those who are different from us. Mm-hmm.

And a commitment to building unity and understanding even amidst disagreement. And this, as Keener reminds us, is not a solo endeavor. It's not.

It's something we do together with the body of Christ. Rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us and to empower us. It's about recognizing that we are all part of something bigger than ourselves.

Yeah. That we are all members of one family. Mm-hmm.

United in Christ. Yes. And called to reflect His love and grace.

Absolutely. To a world that desperately needs to see it. So as we wrap up our deep dive— Yeah.

—into respecting differences in the early church, I think the challenge before us is clear. It's not enough to simply nod our heads in agreement with Paul's teachings. No, it's not.

We need to put those teachings into practice. Absolutely. Yeah.

We need to be willing to step outside our comfort zones, to engage with those who are different from us, and to build bridges of understanding and respect. We need to be intentional about cultivating a spirit of humility and unity— Yeah. —within our churches and communities.

And most importantly, we need to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us and to empower us as we seek to live out these principles in our everyday lives. Because ultimately, it is in our unity that the world will see the truth and beauty of the gospel. And it is in our love for one another that we will truly reflect the heart of our Savior Jesus Christ.

We hope you've enjoyed this deep dive into respecting differences in the early church. It's been a great conversation. It's a topic that's as relevant today as it was back then.

Absolutely. And as you go about your day, we encourage you to reflect on these principles and to consider how you can put them into practice in your own life. Thanks for joining us.