

Romans 14:1~12, part 1

Start by asking the congregation to “*look around*” and think of ONE WORD that would “*accurately*” describe all of us “*as a whole*.” One word, and it must apply to every single individual in the room.

Different... Every one of us is different. And when you think about the fact that we are all different, it’s hard to comprehend the possibility of unity. Given the vast differences in backgrounds, upbringings, personalities...it’s seems more likely that there would be “*conflict*” rather than “*harmony*.” The more you think about it, its difficult to grasp the thought we’d all “*get along*,” much less “*love each other*,” which is what Christ has commanded us to do.

Unity is not conformity... Unity is not achieved by getting everyone to think the same way, believe the same thing. If that is the case, there would never be unity. Unity is accomplished by showing love and respect to our brother, in spite of our differences! Unity means “*oneness*,” with the opposite of “*division*.” The church is either in “*One Accord*” or it is “*Divided*.” And here, Paul reveals that the only way to achieve unity among such diversity, the only way to be in one accord rather than have division, is to walk in love towards one another. To love one another, in spite of our differences, creates unity.

One of the greatest witnesses of the church to this world is that of the harmony of its people. God’s desire is that the church be the shining example of a peaceful, united, loving society. It is to serve as the example of what God desires for the world to be. If the world looks at the church and sees fussing and fighting, animosity, grudges, backbiting, etc, why on earth would they want to be a part of that? They have that already...right?

Thus, the witness of the unity, harmony, peace and love among the church is vital in our efforts to reach this world for Christ. Here in Romans 14, Paul gives us some instruction to help accomplish that. What appears to be impossible, given such diversity, is possible when you understand the barrier. Throughout this section, Paul identifies the barrier, the obstacles that must be overcome if there is ever to be peace, and harmony. The barrier being our differences of opinion! We all have different opinions on certain things, different perspectives about certain issues.

It is VITAL to understand, that “*here*,” Paul is not talking about the clear, doctrinal teachings of scripture. He’s not referring to important doctrinal issues concerning Christ, concerning such things as the deity of Christ, the teachings of his death and resurrection, how men are justified before God, things like that, because it is critical that everyone understand the truth! There is only one way for men to be right with God, and we must guard that. There are things that scripture clearly defines as wrong, even abominable in God’s sight...lying, stealing, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, etc... We could go on and on, but my point is, that is not what Paul is referring to here. Such matters are not up for discussion, nor are we to make allowances for opinions. Scripture is the authority in such cases. We are to shape “*our opinions*” in such cases to match the “*opinion of God*.”

So it needs to be clear...here Paul is not referring to important doctrines of the church, or to lifestyles or practices that the bible clearly teaches as right or wrong. What he is referring to here is what we might refer to as “*gray areas*.” Issues or matters that the bible is simply not clear on, or areas that have simply not been correctly understood by all in the church.

Throughout this chapter, Paul refers to the “*strong*” and the “*weak*.” The strong is a reference to believers who have matured in their faith, those who have grown in their knowledge of Jesus Christ and his ways. The weak is a reference to those less mature, those who maybe are just starting out in their new walk with Christ. I think its important to point out, that strong or weak in the faith here is not a reference to their belief in Jesus Christ, speaks to the “*liberty*” we have in Christ. What we can and can’t do.

The *weak* here is a reference to those who have been saved by placing their trust in Christ, but are still in bondage to legalism, still in bondage to error, in bondage to ignorance. To all of which Jesus proclaims, “*the truth shall set you free...*” Christ portrays the Jews submission to the Law as bondage. Almost as prisoner in shackles, or a slave held captive. In Matthew 11, Jesus called all that labored and were heaven laden to come to him, and he’d give them rest. He portrayed the Law using the analogy of a yoke, that big contraption placed on donkey’s to pull a load. In Christ, that yoke is broken, and we are set free!

In Christ, we have been set free! The prison chains have been broken; the yoke removed...set *free to live*. Which helps better understand what Paul is talking about in this passage. Here is speaking to the “*Amount of freedom*” that is being enjoyed. The “*Weaker*” here are those who are still somewhat bound and very apprehensive about a lot of things. They struggle with a lot of the things they see other believers doing, because that old strict ways of legalism is still very much ingrained in them! They were raised that way all their life, and to do contrary is wrong. While they watch a brother in Christ partake without any conviction at all.

That’s what we see here in this passage...The issues that Paul makes reference to here may be a little hard for us to understand, given the fact that we were not brought up in Jewish and Roman culture. Here Paul speaks of “*eating meats*” and “*holy days.*” Things that are a little hard for us to comprehend considering our upbringing. We may not give it a second thought to eat pork, but to the orthodox Jew, that’s unimaginable! We may even know what “*Yom Kippur*” is (which started this past Friday), which in the Jewish mind, is a very sacred and holy day.

There’s a good chance, “*esteeming one day above another,*” is likely a reference to the Sabbath. A very important holy day in the Jewish mind...This section might be better understood in light of our cultural issues... **Is it right for a Christian...**To do any work on Sunday? That’s been a topic of disagreement for centuries in the church. By a show of hands, very quickly, don’t look around, how many think its wrong to work on Sunday? How many think its ok? These are the differences that Paul is talking about here...

Is it right for a Christian to go bowling...to play cards...to play pool...to go to the movies...to work on Sunday...to wear shorts to church...to play bingo... to smoke...to mow yard on Sunday...to eat out on Sunday...for women to wear pants...for women to cut their hair...to wear make-up...to eat at a restaurant that sells alcohol...

T The issues can go on and on...and the question with each one is... **Is it Right or Wrong?**
ANSWER IS...it depends on WHO you ask!

Listen very closely...this is the heart of Paul’s point. We all have our opinion on such issues and feel very strongly about them. We may be convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we’re right! But his point is, first of all, that doesn’t mean we’re right! That’s our opinion! Just because you or I believe something to be a certain way, doesn’t make it so! We need to keep in mind, that everyone has “*the right to an opinion,*” but we *do not have the right* to “*impose that opinion*” on those who don’t see it that way. It’s not our place to judge our brother in the Lord in such matters based on our opinion, based solely on *our take* on the matter.

In verse 4, Paul says, “*Don’t be so judgmental! Who died and left you boss?*”

⁴*Who art thou that judge another man’s servant? to his own master he stands or falls. Yea, he shall be held up: for God is able to make him stand.*

“*Don’t be so critical of your brother in the Lord based on your standard of spirituality!*” If we’re not careful, rather than walking love towards our brothers and sisters in the Lord, we might be found with a “*Criticizing spirit,*” judging them, backbiting...

Maybe you feel very strongly that it is wrong to “eat out or to shop on Sundays.” Teri and I do, but who’s to say we are right? It’s obvious by the number of Christians who do, many don’t agree with us. We both feel convicted that we shouldn’t eat out or shop on Sundays, for the simple reason that it causes people to have to work, thus they can’t possibly go to Church. (*If they wanted to.*)

Now you could argue with me, that there ain’t nothing wrong with it... But to do so, is to miss the whole point Paul is trying to make. We are not to argue about it! Whether or not that’s right, *is between you and the Lord*... Which is the point Paul’s trying to make here. When it comes to these “gray areas,” each of us needs to follow our heart in what we think is right and pleasing to God!

Teri and I try to make every effort to not to do that, sometimes its impossible, when traveling, but we try to make it as little as possible. Now just because we feel that way, in no way gives us the right to try and impose our opinion on you. It’s not my place to “judge” those who do... “based on my opinion.” That’s between them and the Lord!

What you do and don’t do *is between you and the Lord*... therefore; it’s not to come between us!

We may see things completely differently... You may have no problem with playing cards, playing bingo, bowling, going to the movies... And I may be just the opposite, seeing all that as wrong, and want no part of it. Paul says, that’s fine, because that’s the way it’s going to be, were not always going to see things the same way. Point is, we need to make sure that “our problem with certain things,” or “lack of problem,” doesn’t become a problem between us as brothers! Paul says, don’t either of you judge the other, that’s God’s place...

(Vs 1~4) ¹*Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.* ²*For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eats herbs.* ³*Let not him that eats despise him that eats not; and let not him which eats not judge him that eats: **for God hath received him.*** ⁴*Who art thou that judges another man’s servant? to his own master he stands or falls. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.*

Here Paul uses the example of “eating meat.” One guy sees nothing wrong with it, and eats all kinds. While the other thinks it is wrong, and has nothing to do with it, and will only eat vegetables. To which Paul says, don’t let the “meat eater” look down on the “veggie eater,” nor should the “veggie eater” judge the “meat eater.” They both feel strongly about their positions on the matter, both feel they are right. In this case, the “Stronger,” the meat eater, is the one who ultimately is right. He understands that whether he eats meat or not, makes no difference, that their truly is nothing wrong with eating meat.

(1Co. 8) ⁴*As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.* ⁵*For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) ⁶But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.*

⁷***Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge:** for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. **(the weaker.)*** ⁸*But meat commends us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.* ⁹*But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak.* ¹⁰*For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; ¹¹And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? ¹²But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. ¹³Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend.*

Even though the “Stronger” knows there’s nothing wrong with it, he is to consider his “weaker brother.” The weaker may have been brought up being taught that eating meat was wrong! And now that he’s

saved, even though he hears what the preacher says, *he still has trouble* with eating meat. He doesn't have the liberty that the stronger brother has, his mind is still greatly influenced by the way he was raised. Every time he tries to, he ends up feeling guilty. Thus we who have no problem are not to impose our opinions on him, trying to get him to eat it, because that makes him go against his conscience, which brings about guilt. Even though it's not necessarily "*wrong*" to eat meat, it bothers him! Paul explains the problem...

⁷Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. (the weaker.)

The "*weaker*" brother is still in bondage to the way he was raised! The stronger brother is the one who has been set free from such bondage, through understanding that there are no other gods, idols are nothing more than stone figures. Everything that exists belongs to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and is sanctified by prayer.

Don't miss Paul's point here in Romans... The "*Stronger*" eats meat because he simply has grown in the Faith, and knows that meat makes no difference. Therefore it doesn't bother him to eat meat. He's confident in his heart that he's not sinning against God by eating meat. He prays over it and thanks God for it. The "*weaker*" won't eat the meat, due to the fact that he's still young in the faith. He's been raised that eating meat offered to idols is wrong! And this is deeply ingrained in his mind, and very difficult to get out! And you know what, he may struggle with it the rest of his life...and that's fine. The Lord doesn't have a problem with, so nor should we.

The Stronger is not to look down on the weaker, nor is the weaker to judge the stronger. Verse 3...*for God hath received him*. The weaker may feel very strongly that eating meat is wrong, but Paul says, don't judge your brother, that's not your place, that's God's place. God has received both him that eats the meat, and he that eats not. Both are acceptable in their actions before God, both are doing what they truly believe in their heart is pleasing to God... So don't be so quick to judge each other... They may not be living exactly the way you think they should...but you need to remember, they are not responsible to you, they are responsible to the Lord!

⁴Who art thou that judges another man's servant? to his own master he stands or falls. Yea, he shall be held up: for God is able to make him stand.

To his own master he stands or falls... In other words, if he is wrong, God will take care of it, right? If your convictions are that it's wrong to eat meat, than don't eat it. But just don't go around judging your brother because you feel that way. Don't walk around criticizing others based on your standard of spirituality. Whoever is in the error, God will show it to him, and God is able to change his heart to what's right.

Beloved, we all have different opinions of things, we have different takes on certain things...the point here is, we are not to let those differences come between us! We must be careful and not belittle someone who maybe simply weak in the faith. Nor should we judge someone who maybe enjoying the liberty they have in Christ. It's not our place to judge our brother or sister; *our place is to love* them in spite of our differences. God will do the judging...and judge he will. Each one of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give answer.