

Accepting
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Romans 14:1-12

Happy Memorial Day weekend!

The chapter headings in our Bible can be excellent summaries. The heading for Romans 14 in the ESV reads: “Do Not Pass Judgment on One Another.” [Judgment about what?] Paul summed up where he was headed with the words of the first verse of Romans 14 as he urged Christ-followers: “Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.” (NIV)ⁱ

What are “disputable matters?” Who is the “weaker” Christian? What makes someone a mature believer? What’s the difference between unity and uniformity? We will get to these questions as we unpack this text.

First, a warning, Paul is calling out two kinds of Christians: 1) Uptight, legalistic Christians who believe everyone should act, think, and look like they do and “judges” them for it; and 2) grace-loving, freedom-embracing Christians that “despise” the uptight Christians. Paul says both are to accept the other when it comes to “disputable matters.”

St. Augustine put it this way, “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”ⁱⁱ

Big Idea: Followers of Christ should be unified on the truth of scripture while loving and accepting our brothers and sisters despite our differences on things that are not in scripture.

Let’s be clear on something before we dive in. This lesson doesn’t teach that all conflict in the church is unhealthy. Conflict will happen because we are human. Sometimes we need conflict to hold each other accountable to the truths of scripture. That needs to be dealt with in Christian love. This lesson is about living in harmony when we disagree on “non-essentials.”

Christians disagreeing on “non-essentials” goes back to the first century church. In this case the disputes were about food, drink, and how they honored certain days, especially the Sabbath. Some newer believers had issues of conscience in these areas because of their background. Others had fully embraced freedom in Christ but forgot about the priority of loving their neighbor (Gal. 5:13-14.)

Romans 14:1–12 (ESV)

Do Not Pass Judgment on One Another

14 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹ for it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”

¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

- Followers of Christ are to “welcome” or “accept” one another even when we differ on “disputed matters.” The word “accept” is stronger than just “tolerate.” It means fellowship without trying to make them like you!

- Paul said, “don’t quarrel” in disputes between “weaker” Christ-followers and those who were stronger in their Christian liberty.
- Here we see two different believers: the weaker and the stronger in faith.
- The terminology is counterintuitive. In church circles the aggressive rule keeper is typically assumed to be the “stronger” Christian.
- In Paul’s teaching the weaker believer hasn’t fully embraced the fact that following Christ is about embracing what Jesus did for us on the cross not about keeping rules and regulations. Weaker didn’t mean inferior.
- In fairness to these weaker believers and their concerns about what food to eat, some of them were saved out of pagan idol worship and others out of a lifetime of adhering to dietary laws of the Jewish faith.
- When Paul says be accepting of the differences among believers, he was not talking about giving sin a free pass. Paul always called out those who were violating the commands of scripture (see 1 Cor.5.)
- Paul said not to quarrel over “opinions” or “disputed matters.”
- So, what defines a “disputed” or “non-essential” opinion?
- If something is clearly stated as a command of scripture it’s not my opinion or in dispute. The problem arises when followers of Christ raise non-scriptural ideas and traditions almost to the level of scripture itself.
- Swindoll: *“Matters about which there is no clear scriptural teaching are morally neutral. They might be unwise, but they are not sin.”^{xiii}*
- Embracing grace (as opposed to the law) can result in three categories of conduct by believers: legalism, license, and liberty.
- Christian liberty is the goal! Paul wrote in Galatians 5:13 (ESV)
¹³For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.
- Living in Christian liberty means I embrace salvation through grace not works. I’m saved by what Jesus did on the cross not by keeping rules.

- Our friend Steve Brown wrote a book entitled: “Scandalous Freedom” in which he takes on the uptight legalists. He says things that some would feel are outrageous. For instance: *“You ought to live your life with such freedom and joy that uptight Christians will doubt your salvation.”^{iv}*
- Let’s talk for a minute about legalism. What does a legalist look like?
- We all know the routine, *“They must not be a Christian if they...(fill in the blank.)”* The blank is usually filled with things not in scripture.
- The legalist values UNIFORMITY over UNITY. They want everyone to wear the same “uniform” of tradition they wear. *“We don’t smoke, and we don’t chew, and we don’t go with the girls who do!”*
- The legalist is always trying to catch another Christian messing up!
- A true but ridiculous illustration: “Preachers shouldn’t drive a red car.”
- Another quote from Steve Brown: *“Jesus invited us to a dance ... and we’ve turned it into a march of soldiers, always checking to see if we’re doing it right and are in step and in line with the other soldiers. We know a dance would be more fun, but we believe we must go through hell to get to heaven, so we keep marching.”^v* [Did he say “dance” and “hell?”]
- So, the legalists are the problem! Not so fast. There’s another extreme.
- The term “license” is used to describe those who embrace their freedom in Christ to the point of considering it almost a “license to sin.” (Jude 1:4)
- If you think your freedom in Christ a license to sin then you missed our lesson on Romans 6! Romans 6:1–2 (ESV)
6 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?
- We’ve traditionally looked at legalism and license as two opposite poles. J.D. Greear believes they are actually two “flowers” of the same root: *“License” is not the polar opposite of legalism, it is simply another type of legalism. **Religious legalists** attempt to overcome that emptiness and shame by*

*conforming to a religious standard which makes them good and acceptable people. They find their fulfillment in knowing they are “good Christians,” because they have obtained a sufficient level of obedience. **Non-religious legalists** attempt to find their fulfillment not by pursuing religious accomplishment, but by pursuing some secular goal—making money, looking good in the eyes of others, etc. They hope that when they have “done enough,” i.e. made enough money, bought enough stuff, obtained the higher position, found enough sensual pleasure, etc., they will be fulfilled. Both religious and non-religious legalists operate from a position of emptiness and shame. They both think that they must obtain something in order to overcome that emptiness and shame.”*

- Back to our text in Romans 14, Paul was telling BOTH those who were bothered by “non-essential” issues and those who were embracing their freedom in Christ, stop “despising” and “judging” each other!
- Verse four: ⁴ Who are you to condemn someone else’s servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord’s help, they will stand and receive his approval. ^{vi}
- The New AP translation: Who appointed you to be “assistant” to God?
- Verse ten: ¹⁰ So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ^{vii} Verse twelve: ¹² Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. ^{viii}
- “The Judgment Seat of Christ is that place where Christians will have their works judged by the Lord. It has nothing to do with our sins, since Christ has paid for them and they can be held against us no more (Rom. 8:1).”^{ix} Warren Wiersbe asks, *“How does the Christian prepare for the Judgment Seat of Christ? By making Jesus Lord of his life and faithfully obeying Him. Instead of judging other Christians, we had better judge our own lives and make sure we are ready to meet Christ at the bema.”*^x
- My take: Sadly some prefer a microscope (on others) to a mirror!

- It's clear we're not supposed to judge, despise, or quarrel about "disputed matters" not in scripture, but what if I'm the "stronger" believer?
- How SHOULD I exercise my freedom in Christ in a way that promotes harmony and unity in the church?
- Paul has higher expectations of the more mature (stronger) believers to not be a "stumbling block" (14:13) to that weaker brother or sister.
- He says in Romans 15:1 (ESV) **15** We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.
- That stronger more mature believer should be sensitive not to offend the "weaker" believer whose conscience is bothered by non-essentials.
- Romans 14:20–21 (ESV) ²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.
- Something may not be prohibited in scripture, and I may not be convicted by it, but if enjoying it would hurt a "weaker" believer, I should not do it.

So, What's the Takeaway?

Warren Wiersbe shares an illustration: *"Two of the most famous Christians in the Victorian Era in England were Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker, both of them mighty preachers of the Gospel. Early in their ministries they fellowshiped and even exchanged pulpits. Then they had a disagreement, and the reports even got into the newspapers. Spurgeon accused Parker of being unspiritual because he attended the theater. Interestingly enough, Spurgeon smoked cigars, a practice many believers would condemn. Who was right? Who was wrong? Perhaps both of them were wrong! When it comes to questionable matters in the Christian life, cannot dedicated believers disagree without being disagreeable?"^{xii}*

- As St. Augustine said, *"In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity."^{xii}*

- Followers of Christ should be unified on the truth of scripture while loving and accepting our brothers and sisters despite our differences on things that are not in scripture.
- Let's ask God to help us grow into mature "stronger" believers who are looking out for the consciences of our "weaker" brothers and sisters.

ⁱ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Ro 14:1). Grand Rapids, MI:

ⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 559). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Romans (Swindoll's New Testament Insights) (p. 268). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

^{iv} Steve Brown, A Scandalous Freedom - June 1st 2004 by Howard Books

^v ibid

^{vi} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Ro 14:4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{vii} ibid

^{viii} ibid

^{ix} ibid

^x ibid

^{xi} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 560). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{xii} ibid