Grace in the Grays
Series: Righteousness Revealed
Romans 14:1-23
Chadron Bible Church

There's been a lot of **comical church disputes** in churches over the years. I've listed a few here for you. There's been arguments over…I've shared some of these with you in the past but here they are:

- The length of the worship pastor's **beard**.
- A petition to have all church staff **clean shaven**.
- Use of land: to build a children's **playground** or to use the land for a **cemetery**
- Whether to call the church meal a **potluck** or pot **blessings**. [fellowship dinner]
- Whether or not it was okay to use a **DirtDevil** vacuum cleaner.
- Whether or not the church should allow **deviled eggs** at the potluck.
- Whether or not to have a **clock** in the worship center.
- Whether or not the worship leader should wear **shoes** during the service.
- Whether to use **grape or cran/grape** for the Lord's supper.
- Fights over the brand of **coffee**. I totally understand. I can see that as an opp. for flesh.
- Just recently I heard about a tv for lyrics in the worship center being the straw that broke the camel's back and closed the church doors.

While these are somewhat comical disputes, when it's your church that's arguing over something **doubtful** or ***nonessential***, in reality it can be a very **painful thing**. Real lives are impacted and injured. It can hinder, unnecessarily, the advancement of the gospel and the spiritual growth of Christians. So, **how should Christians respond when something is neither prohibited nor required? When it's not a moral issue? Non-essential? And when there is disagreement among Christians over them?** Welcome to Romans 14! That's what we want to discuss.

Framework for faithful living & what a **transformed life** looks like (12:1-2):

1. Harbor **humility** in God's household. (12:3-8)
2. **Love** others as Jesus loves us. (12:9-21)
3. **Clothe** ourselves with Christlike conduct. (13:1-14)
4. Give **grace** in the grays. (14:1-23)

Before we dive in, we should remind ourselves that the churches at Rome a **mixed, Jewish and Gentile** audience with different **backgrounds**, and therefore, different **sensitivities** in their **conscience** that they are working through as they learn to walk free in Jesus. So they know Jesus, but they are still growing in Him, still learning to walk in a way that pleases Him.

*Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions [without **disputing over doubtful things**]. 2 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 3 The one who eats is not to regard with*

contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

So here we go talking about food again. Not helpful for a pastor trying to keep your attention. In the passage, the **weak in faith** is primarily the **Jew** who still feels obliged to keep some OT Law stipulations. The **specific case** here is concerning dietary laws. He is still hung up on eating **kosher**. No **seafood**. No **pork**. No meat **sacrificed to idols**. When you went and bought meat at a local market, there was a very likely chance that that meat was sacrificed to an idol first. And so sometimes Jews had their own butchers. But some were so sensitive and uncertain as to where a butcher's meat came from, they wouldn't eat any at all. They would become **vegetarians**. Their conscience is probably **overly sensitive** and would be **weak in faith.** They didn't understand they were free to eat whatever they wanted now in the New Covenant.

A sensitive conscience is a good thing, but it can sometimes lead a person to **restrict his or her freedom unnecessarily**. So we might say these Jews are saved but **still a little legalistic**, which is funny, because sometimes we view the legalists as "strong." Actually, they're not totally secure in Christ. They've still got some performance-based issues to deal with. I think every Christian I know deals with this on some level. They would look upon their Gentile brothers who ate this meat with disdain.

The **strong in faith** would be primarily the **Gentile** who understands that in Christ, he has the **freedom** to eat whatever. He can eat a BLT and load it with bacon. And he can have shrimp as an appetizer. He doesn't get hung up on that.

Not a matter of salvation.
If you're a student of Galatians or other Pauline passages where Paul deals with the OT Law, you may see this as a surprise—that he doesn't condemn keeping certain Law codes and scold the Jews—but the big difference between those passages and this one is that it's **not a matter of salvation**. This is about what is right and wrong **within the freedom of Christ**. So the first big application here is in **v. 3:**

a. Accept others as God has **accepted** you. (14:1-4)

He primarily defends the strong in verse 3, but overall we'll see, the strong are not to look down on the weak and the weak are not to look down on the strong. Neither one is to see themselves as superior. They are to see each other in Christ. Accepted in Him **whether they eat the meat or not**. It's a **gray matter.**

Gray Matters/Areas
This passage is dealing with what we would call **gray matters**. Some call them "**doubtful things**" according to some translations of 14:1. Theologians call them **adiaphora**—things that are **neither prohibited nor required** by the Chrisitan faith. Amoral is probably a helpful term. **Amoral** means they are not morally right or wrong. They're not a sin issue.

Something extremely helpful for the church to understand to maintain <u>unity</u> is that not all teachings/practices <u>carry the same weight</u>. There are: [see chart]

1. **<u>Primary</u> Issues: Truths of Dogma/<u>Orthodoxy</u> that affect fellowship with others**
   Trinity, physical return of Christ, literal resurrection, Deity of Christ, justification by faith. Test orthodoxy. Things you would die one. Pass the gun to the head test.
2. **<u>Secondary</u> Issues: <u>Convictions</u> that might affect ministry with others; different levels of commitment among Christians and churches.**
   Calvinism/Arminianism, End times schemes, sign gifts, church government, methods of communion & baptism, the age of the earth. These are important but they don't carry the same weight. They aren't salvation issues. They don't pass the **gun to the head test**.
3. **<u>Tertiary</u> Issues: <u>Gray Areas.</u> Matter of conscience. Not inherently right or wrong.**
   Alcohol consumption, Bible translation to use, clothes to wear, food to eat (kosher), hobbies are acceptable, holidays to celebrate, music one can listen too, songs that are acceptable to sing, instruments acceptable to play in church, matters of personal finance, healthcare, tattoos, schooling.

It's important to at least be aware of this. Categorizing these things is super helpful because **if you treat every secondary and tertiary issue like it's do or die, the room gets very small**, very quick. Churches can divide and shut the doors over things that don't matter that much. The church will divide over everything.

Fundamentalists
Back in the day, to **be a member of a lot of churches like our own you couldn't dance, go to the movies, played cards.** They were viewed as worldly things. And you might say I don't do those things so that makes me a strong Christian. That's actually **weak** thinking.

Illustration: Pool Table
One gentleman I read said his grandfather didn't think it was acceptable for a Christian to play **pool**, probably because of the settings pool tables are often found in. You know what was funny to me? When I read that, I was sitting in the Bean Broker and there were some guys playing pool 5 feet from me. I was putting a sermon together right beside one. And I thought about playing!

Going **back to the context** of Romans, Paul talks about God acceptance of the strong, so the weak should also do the same. **Addressing the weak in v. 4**with a singular you, he says…

*4 Who are **you** [speaking to the weak in faith] to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

And Paul **gets after those who are weak in faith** by saying, according to the Master, the **strong** in faith—who can eat all things—is accepted. He is **justified**. He stands before God. **God approves of his liberty** so who are you to tell him not to enjoy that?

He likens the Jew and the Gentile with their differences as **servants of the same master**. In such a setting, what **doesn't matter** is the opinion of either servant, but the **opinion of the master**. It

doesn't matter if he tells one to do one thing and another to do something else. They shouldn't worry about each other, but about whether they are following the orders they've been given at that point in their relationship with Him.

He goes on to give **another specific case of disagreement**:

5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. 7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or 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 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? 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 give praise to God." 12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

On top of the meat situation, he talks about **observance of days**, like the **Sabbath**. Christians as early on as the NT began to meet on Sunday, the day Christ rose from the grace, but some saved Jews were clearly **still sensitive to the Jewish calendar holidays and Sabbath**—which is from Friday evening to Saturday evening. In Christ, according to Hebrews, technically **every day** is a Sabbath day. We have entered into the **rest** in Jesus and have **ceased** from works. But as Paul says, **if people want to observe those days, that's fine**—as long as it's not a salvation issue.

Whether we **eat, live, or die, we do it for the Lord**—to **please** Him—and that's what matters most. Colossians 3:17 is a key cross reference. Paul says, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17). Each person being convinced of what God wants to do. Living and dying for Him. Letting Him be the judge.

b. Act in a way that you believe **pleases** the Lord. (vv. 5-12)

It's okay to say that with gray areas. This is Paul's way of saying **you worry about you**. You don't need to worry about what another is doing in nonessentials. If there's a real sin issue that needs dealt with, Jesus and Paul talk about that, but there's a time to mind your own business. **To understand God doesn't treat us all the same and we're all at different places and season in our walk with Jesus.**

What I love about this passage is the **patient shepherd heart** of it. Paul doesn't expect everyone to immediately be in uniformity of thinking and behavior. There's grace for living. Grace for growing.

Illustration: Raising Every Kid the Same?

I like the analogy of a family. Sometimes, in the desire for fairness, parents try to raise their kids the same. But children are very different. They have different personalities, areas of vulnerability. Each child needs to be parented a little differently. It's equally true within the body of Christ. Every child of God is a touch different. Where some experience great freedom, others will struggle and have hangups.

Illustration: Drums & Guitars; Alcohol
I know of a pastor who struggles with electric instruments in church because he came out of a heavy drugs and rock n roll background. For a while when I came to Christ, I wouldn't be caught dead around alcohol. I couldn't believe any Christian would drink it. God helped me through that. Not so much anymore.

The text is saying, in Christian community, we need to personally ask ourselves, Why am **I** doing this? Am **I** doing this unto the Lord? Am I giving thanks to the Lord for it?

c. **Allow love** to shape your **liberty** and **limitations**. (14:13-15)

13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an ***obstacle*** *or a* ***stumbling block*** *in a brother's way. 14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.*

So again, I want to reiterate that when he says **don't judge one another**, he's not saying there isn't a time to make judgments and address clear, right and wrong, moral issues. Scriptures address that elsewhere. Here he is talking about non-essentials. Gray areas.

And the idea is that we should operate in such a way so as not to unnecessary make another brother or sister **stumble**. The Greek words translated "**obstacle**" and "**stumbling bloc**k" are just referring to something that someone might trip over on a path or get caught in, like a snare trap. The idea is that we should operate in such a way so as not to unnecessary make another brother or sister **stumble**. Be tempted to sin.

Theologically, Paul says he **sides with the strong**, who know Chrisitan liberty. He knows that meat is not **good or evil. Clean or unclean**. We're not under Law.

Defining Freedom; Freedom to Love
But he is aware that this can make the strong proud-I'm going to do this whether you like it or not—and the weak condemning. So either way, they should be willing to live in love. But he is aware that the strong in faith can become **proud of their freedom** and **flaunt** it before the weak, **hindering** them. **Tempting** them. **Destroying** the unity of the church. So we need to be aware of how our liberties or limitations are effecting those around us and operate in love. In Christ we're free. But we're not free to just be selfish all over again. We're free to love our neighbors. Allow love to shape your liberty and limitations. (14:13-15)

Illustration: Slowing Your Pace
I like the illustration of an adult walking with a child. We might say adults are stronger than children. Have more freedom. They can walk faster because they have longer legs. **But what do strong, sensitive adults do?** They willingly alter their pace of walking while leading a small child by the hand so the child will not stumble. One children's devotional I read that stuck said, "Be patient with the turtles" whether they're young or old. How much more should we be willing to alter our Christian walk for the benefit of a weaker brother or sister in Christ whom we are leading.

- Why a Christian missionary to India might not eat meat where it's morally wrong.
- Why Christian woman in Muslim territory might cover her head.
- Why Paul in Acts kept certain stipulations to reach the Jews.

d. **Aim** to advance **unity** and individual **growth**. (14:16-23)

16 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 So then we pursue the things which make for ***peace*** *and the* ***building up of one another****. 20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. 22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.*
[it's not what he believes is right]

Paul continues to drive the point home, reminding them of **what matters most. What should be prioritized. Keep the main thing the main thing.** The main thing isn't food or drink in God's kingdom. It's not tithing. It's joy, r'eousnes, peace, justice mercy, kindness. That culture in church and people's personal walk matters more than my freedom.

God's people and God's mission are more important exercising freedom. At the end of the matter, we can ask ourselves with our liberties or limitations: Why am I doing this? Am I doing this because I have permission, or am I doing this because, in my heart, I really think this pleases God, and I'm going to enjoy this, and I'm going to celebrate this, and be thankful for this before God?