

Romans 14 “Do Not Quarrel Over Opinions”  
Zechariah 7  
Psalm 34

January 4, 2009

Let me start by saying that as I prepared this sermon  
I could not think of many particular applications to this congregation.  
I’m afraid that you are not a very quarrelsome bunch,  
so I think I will mostly be exhorting you to continue your peaceful ways!

**Introduction: The Weak in Faith (14:1)**

*As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.*

Paul has just said that we are not to live like the nations around us.

The night is far gone; the day is at hand.

We live in the hour between the resurrection of Jesus  
and the final resurrection of the dead.

We cannot live in darkness – we cannot walk in the ways of darkness,  
in orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, sensuality, quarreling and jealousy.

We are called to put on the armor of light –  
to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh,  
to gratify its desires.” (13:14)

So there is no place in the Christian life for indulging the flesh.

Paul is about to introduce the question of “adiaphora” –  
things indifferent –  
things about which Christians may disagree.

But before he does he wants to make it clear,  
there is *no place* in the Christian life for gratifying the desires of the flesh.

We have freedom in Christ,  
but do not use your freedom for selfish reasons.

Rather, as Paul will say in verse 17

“the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking  
but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

And therefore Paul recognizes that there are matters where Christians may disagree.

There are things that are *adiaphora* (indifferent).

And Paul says that regarding such things,

*As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions*  
(or as Murray paraphrases,

“not for the purpose of subjecting the convictions and thoughts of one another  
to censorious scrutiny.”)

It is important to note two things up front:

1) these people are *weak* in faith.

The idea is that they are not healthy.

It is not a good thing to be weak.

No one should ever use their weakness as an argument against others!

Rather, if you are weak in faith, then the solution is to grow strong!

So Paul is not saying that these things indifferent are purely neutral.

There is a right and a wrong.

There is a good and a bad.

2) But second, these things are not worthy of quarreling.

They are not worthy of dispute.

You may be right – but so what?

The kingdom of God does not stand or fall with these things.

So as you welcome those who are weak in faith,  
do not get caught up in quarreling about opinions.  
You who are strong should bear with the weak.

But what are we talking about here?

What is an opinion?

What is a matter that is adiaphora?

What is truly indifferent?

Paul does not give us an exhaustive list (obviously),  
but he does give us some examples.

Notice that his examples have to do with the interpretation of the law  
as it pertains to Christian practice.

He does not include doctrine

(though I daresay that he would probably include  
the supra- vs. infralapsarian debate in this category!).

And particularly,

Paul talks about things that pertain to individual Christian piety –  
*not* matters of corporate worship.

So,

**1. What Is an “Opinion”? (14:2-6)**

a. The One Who Eats and the One Who Abstains (14:2-4)

*One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. (2)*

Notice that Paul identifies here which is the weak person:  
the one who eats only vegetables.

This sounds similar to Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians about food offered to idols,  
but there is no mention here of idolatry.

Paul's point here is broader.

Jewish food laws required the kosher slaughter of meat.

It would appear that some Jewish Christians in Rome were abstaining from meat,  
and only eating vegetables.

Paul says that this one is weak.

And he addresses both the weak and the strong, saying:

*Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains,*

The tendency in Rome, no doubt,

was for the "strong" – who recognized that Christ had declared all foods clean –  
to look down on those who abstained from meat.

And Paul says that this is wrong.

But he uses a stronger admonition to the weak:

*Let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats,  
for God has welcomed him.*

The flow of the passage indicates that this last phrase (for God has welcomed him)  
is speaking particularly of the one who eats meat.

After all, the question in the Roman church was *not* whether God would accept Jews!

The question that Paul addresses in detail earlier in Romans  
was whether (and how) God would accept Gentiles.

Does God accept those who eat meat?

Even unclean meat – like pork?

Paul's admonition to the "weak in faith" is do not pass judgment on the one who eats,  
because God has welcomed him.

And then he addresses the weak even further:

*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. (3-4)*

Paul's repetition of the word "pass judgment"  
indicates that this question is addressed to the weak in faith.  
The weak in faith should not pass judgment on Gentiles (or Jews) who ate meat.  
After all, he will stand before Christ,  
and Christ (who declared all foods clean)  
will certainly make him stand on that day.

Paul then provides a second example of something *adiaphora*:

b. The One Who Esteems One Day as Better and the One Who Esteems All Days Alike (14:5-6)  
*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. (v5)*

What does Paul mean by "esteeming" (or judging) one day better than another?  
We often assume that Paul was referring to those who celebrated OT feast days,  
but it is perhaps helpful to note that Paul uses the same word "to judge"  
in verse 5 that he used to refer to passing judgment in verses 3-4.

For this reason the early Fathers almost universally assumed  
that Paul was still talking about food –  
or more particularly about fasting.

Under this interpretation,  
Paul is saying that one person chooses certain days to fast,  
while another lives his life as a perpetual fast.  
Given that fasting was a very common religious practice in the first century,  
this may in fact be his point.

The fact that Paul's language here seems to echo Zechariah 7 may support this.

In Zechariah 7 the prophet addressed issues of feasting and fasting:  
*Say to all the people of the land and the priests,  
When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh,  
for these 70 years [during the exile in Babylon],  
was it for me that you fasted?  
And when you eat and when you drink,  
do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves? (7:5-6)*

Paul now says that whether we eat or drink,  
whether we fast or feast,  
whether we live or die,  
we are the Lord's.

But whether Paul is talking about feast days or fast days,  
his point is that these things are *adiaphora*.

In Colossians 2:16 Paul will say “let no one pass judgment on you  
in questions of food and drink,  
or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.  
These are a shadow of the things to come,  
but the substance [the body that casts the shadow] belongs to Christ.”

But he *does* object to Jewish Christians insisting that *Gentiles* must observe these days.  
In Galatians 4:8-11 Paul throws up his hands in horror, saying,  
“Formerly, when you did not know God,  
you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.”  
Plainly, he is speaking to Gentiles here.  
And he says to these Gentiles:  
“You observe days and months and seasons and years!  
I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.”

And yet this same Paul would celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem,  
even taking a Nazirite vow and offering animal sacrifices in the temple!  
(Acts 21:26)

So what are we seeing here in Romans 14?  
Remember that Romans is a statement of Paul’s basic teaching.  
There are no major crises that he is seeking to address.  
He is introducing his basic teaching to the church in Rome –  
a church he has never visited.

So when Paul says:  
*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. (v5)*

This is a basic statement of Paul’s position.  
In Colossians he applies it by saying, “don’t get caught up in the shadows –  
remember the substance.”  
In Galatians he applies it by saying, “don’t you dare *make* Gentiles become Jews.”

The problem with the one who is weak in faith  
is that he condemns something that God does not condemn!  
Paul will allow the weak in faith to remain in the church,  
but when the weak in faith take over the church,  
then he writes an epistle like that to the Galatians!

But here in Romans he simply says,  
“each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”  
This *should not* be an issue that divides the church!

*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. (v6)*

So how should we think about this today?  
Sometimes we have “special days.”  
Whether Good Friday, Christmas, or other special services,  
Paul would seem to indicate that these things are *adiaphora*.  
The church may not require you to believe that these things are necessary.  
The church also may not require you to reject these things.

That’s the point of saying that they are “indifferent.”

An indifferent thing must be something that is *in itself* neutral.  
Food is indifferent.  
It really doesn’t matter whether you eat meat or not.  
God never commands you to eat meat.  
Therefore whether you eat meat or not doesn’t matter!

So this is a different matter than the question of “conscience.”

To go back to an example from Romans 13,  
if your conscience tells you that you must cheat on your taxes in order to feed your family  
then Paul would tell you – “no, that is *not* a thing indifferent!”  
You might say,  
“but I am simply weak in faith!”  
Paul would reply,  
“no, you are refusing to do what God has commanded.”

God has said that you must pay your taxes.  
Paying taxes, therefore, is not *adiaphora*.

In order to qualify as a thing indifferent, therefore,  
it must be something that God neither commands nor forbids.

This passage is often applied to the consumption of alcoholic beverages,  
or the use of various entertainments.  
And certainly the principle fits.  
Those who see wine and strong drink as gifts to be used in moderation

should not despise those who abstain.  
And those who abstain should not pass judgment on those who drink.

The use of wine at the Lord's Table is something established by our Lord,  
and so even those who abstain from wine on other occasions  
should not hesitate to partake here at the Lord's Supper  
(after all, except immediately after the grape harvest  
there would not have been any "grape juice" available in the 1<sup>st</sup> century).

But Paul's central concern here has to do with matters of individual piety-  
not with matters that pertain to the corporate life of the church.

Different people may have different religious practices.  
Some of you may have family worship every evening.  
Others of you may read the scriptures at meal times.  
Others may have spontaneous discussions of the scriptures all throughout the day.  
But so long as all that you do is done to the Lord,  
and is in keeping with his word,  
then there should be no contention in the church over our differences.

After all,

## **2. Christ Is Lord: We Answer to Him (14:7-12)**

*For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.  
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.  
For to this end Christ died and lived again,  
that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. (7-9)*

This is the plain implication of what Paul has already said:  
Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?

We belong to the Lord.  
We are his servants.

Christ did not die so that *we* might be Lord.  
He died and lived again –  
he was raised from the dead,  
*so that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*

If Jesus is Lord, then we serve him.

And so Paul turns to the "weak" and asks:

*Why do you pass judgment on your brother?*

(remember that in verse 3 it was the one who abstains who was said to pass judgment)

And to the strong he asks:

*Or you, why do you despise your brother?*

(in verse three it was the one who eats who was said to despise the one who abstains).

*For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;*

*for it is written,*

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

*So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. (v10-12)*

You are going to give an account of yourself to God.

Every knee will bow.

Every tongue will confess to God.

So don't worry about the little things.

### **3. Therefore Pursue What Makes for Peace (14:13-19)**

*Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer,*

*but rather decide never to put a stumbling block*

*or hindrance in the way of a brother. (13)*

Here Paul addresses the “strong” – probably the Gentile Christians,

or those Jewish Christians who had abandoned the ceremonial laws –

and he warns them not to put a stumbling block in the path of a brother.

Do not abuse your liberty in Christ.

And Paul explains this in terms of sound theology:

*I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself,*

*but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.*

*For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.*

*By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. (14-15)*

What are your priorities?

What matters more to you?

Being right?

Or loving your brother?

In the first century there were real tensions between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.  
And some Jewish Christians would go so far as to create their own separate churches,  
which broke away from the apostles and eventually died out.  
If being “right” about things indifferent is more important than love,  
then you are destroying the one for whom Christ died.

But on the other hand,  
from the start Paul has made it clear that there is a *right* answer:

*So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. (16)*

You may, for the sake of your brother, abstain from eating or drinking something.  
But you may *not* allow the weaker brother to speak evil of what is good.

On the matter of doctrine Paul will not yield:  
Christ has declared all foods clean.  
But in the matter of practice Paul says that it is no big deal.

*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking  
but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.  
Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. (17-18)*

Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.  
That is what the kingdom of God is all about.  
Quarreling over opinions – debating things indifferent –  
will not advance the kingdom of God.

And so Paul says  
*So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. (19)*

The word here means “housebuilding.”  
We are God’s house,  
and we are called to build each other up -- to pursue peace.

Peace is not merely the absence of conflict.  
The absence of conflict can simply reflect avoidance.

And if we love one another then we may at times provoke one another –  
because if we are to engage in mutual upbuilding,  
if mutual edification is our task,  
then we must engage one another.

Family life is messy.

Family life is dysfunctional (that's a polysyllabic euphemism for *sin!*)  
We are to pursue peace – we are to seek peace.

Paul's assumption is that in the life of the body – in the life of God's house –  
we will be bumping into each other and disagreeing with each other.  
And his point is that these disagreements should not interrupt the work of the church.

**Conclusion: Whatever Does Not Proceed from Faith Is Sin (14:20-23)**

And so Paul concludes by saying:

*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.  
It is good not to eat meat or drink wine  
or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.  
The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God.  
Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.  
(20-22)*

Again you see Paul's distinction between doctrine – “everything is indeed clean”  
and practice – “it is good not ... to do anything that causes your brother to stumble.”

*But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith.  
For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. (23)*

We'll come back to this next week.

For now it is enough to point out that Paul brings us back to where he started  
by reminding us that the central point is faith.

A person may be weak in faith –  
but he still has faith.

Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God (15:7)