

Romans 14:1-12

“Don’t Dispute Over Doubtful Things”

I think it’s important as we carry on in the context of Romans to be continually reminded that we’re in the portion of the book that deals with the practicalities of the Christian life. But before we got here we spent months developing the principles upon which the practical side of Christianity rests. Getting a grip on who God is, and who we are before Him; there’s a tendency in humanity to just want to cut to the chase. “Just tell me what I’m supposed to do.” and Knowing what to do is definitely important, but when it comes to Christianity we have to begin with who God is, and who we are. and Once we get a grip on those things we realize that all that we do isn’t to try and gain a better standing with God, or be granted a form of righteousness *before* God. We’re made righteous by faith in Jesus Christ and there’s nothing we can do to get a better standing *than* that, or be granted a higher form of righteousness in a way that’s opposed *to* that. and Then we’re able to realize that when we do what we do, it’s not from a position of legalism, but from an overflow of love simply responding to the overwhelming display of love/grace, and mercy that God has poured out upon us so abundantly in Christ. Once I begin to understand that, how then can I not give Him the entirety of my life and not serve Him with all that I am? Not to be made right *before* Him, but because I’m so desperately in love *with* Him, want to walk in *intimacy* with Him, in step and in stride, in *unity* with Him. So as we’re here discussing and developing *application* understand that it’s building upon the *foundation* that Paul has been establishing for the 1st 11 Ch’s.

Ch 12 dealt primarily with the way we function as a *body*, Ch 13 with the way we function in *society*, and now Ch 14 the way we function in and deal *with controversy*. Now the NT is filled with insight as to the reality of sin’s power to devastate and destroy the spiritual and moral health of not only you and me individually, but of also the church corporately/collectively. Over and over again the epistles are filled with concise and direct instruction as to how to deal with sinful situations, the fact that the sin of willful non-repentant transgression is to be eradicated and eliminated from the body in order to preserve the purity *therein* and the power *thereof*.

But unfortunately outright rebellious sin isn’t the only danger to a church’s unity, or spiritual health and well-being. Even personal opinions, attitudes, or behaviors (which in and of themselves aren’t sin, but when imposed and impressed upon others who don’t share the same conviction) they can become a means of devastating and destroying fruitfulness, fellowship; they can cripple the work, or the witness and the unity of a congregation. and The tragedy of it all is that these things take place over areas that are neither commanded, or condemned by the scriptures, they’re matters of personal preference. But when I impose my personal preference upon you, inevitably it’ll cause confusion, strife, ill will, a torn conscience and disharmony.

Yet the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul encourages us and exhorts us as believers that everyone of us ought to have a deep drive and desire to, "...*keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" Eph 4:3 Even Jesus in His High priestly prayer there in John 17 voiced the same desire as He was praying. There He was praying for His disciples, but He took a moment to pray not only for His immediate disciples, but for you and me, those who would come to believe in Him over time. and So we read with reference to His immediate disciples, "*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*" John 17:20-21 But for some reason there's something with in me that wants you to see everything exactly like I do, and until you do I'm not going to be satisfied. Why is that? Why do I want you to conform to *my* opinions, and *my* perspectives?

Jon Courson sights 2 possibilities of which I tend to agree, 1st of all *depravity*. It all started in the history of Heaven when Lucifer wanted to be like God. and He passed that desire on to Eve there in the garden telling her that she could be like God if she ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. and Inherent with in us from that time forward is that sin nature that we inherited from Adam, and so there seems to be something diabolically depraved in us that wants to be "god-like," that desires to create people after my own image, get people seeing things my way, hold my perspective as the standard for acceptable.

But then there's also good ol' fashion *misery*, I sometimes feel ripped off at the liberties that other Christians enjoy. and If I feel a conviction not to do something, than rather than simply encourage you to let the Lord lead you, work *in* you, and give direction *to* you, I say, "If it's not right for me, than it's not right for you either, and if I can't do it, than I'm going to make sure you can't do it either." and I impose my personal preference/conviction upon you so that you might join me in my misery. Because I really *want* to do it, but feel convicted *not* to do it, "So you don't do it either, ok?"

Be it depravity, misery, or some other reason entirely, there's undeniably a tendency in people to want others to be conformed to their image, their personal persuasion and set of standards. Therefore we have controversy with in the arena of Christianity, so Paul says.

Vs1

So the idea here is that we're all at different places in our walk, some are stronger, some are weaker, some more mature, other's less mature. That's simply a reality, but it's no reason for not receiving, that is, accepting one another. There's been no spiritual bar established that has to be met before you can pass through those doors and enter into fellowship with us. "How long have you walked with Christ? What are your convictions *in* Christ? Sorry, wrong answer, see ya later, this is the gathering of the spiritual elite." It's not that way, we're to receive one another, encourage, build up and edify one another.

When it says here, "Receive one who is weak in the faith," what's critical to see there is that little word "The" he didn't say, "Weak in faith," he's not distinguishing here a level of

spiritual trust or faithfulness, but those who have a greater and lesser grasp on the totality of the gospel message, what it implies *towards* them, all that it means *for* them. He's saying that some have a greater grip on the gospel and all that it entails than others do, but we're not to separate or segregate ourselves on that basis. and There are a # of issues that might contribute to a persons weakness, they might be a new believer, perhaps they're not in an environment where they're really being fed, (they're not being taught the Word of God.) Could be that they're just not actively exercising the principles and precepts that *they are* being taught. They're spiritually lazy. There's any # of things that could contribute to a weakened disposition as a believer.

But we're to "receive" one another, the gist here being that we're to open our arms towards one another; we're to take one another in, but not to disputes over doubtful things. Which is another critical phrase, "disputes over *doubtful things*." Something that we want to emphasize, probably more than once in our time together this morning is that he's not talking about tolerance where there's clear cut commands or condemnation from the scripture. For instance *fornication* is not a *doubtful* thing, it's clearly condemned by the scriptures, there's no debating that. Drunkenness, drug abuse, these aren't *doubtful things*, loving one another, *that's* not a doubtful thing, clearly *commanded* by the scriptures.

But there are issues that the scriptures don't directly address, in either a commanding or condemning way, where there's room for personal preference and these are the areas that we wrestle over, debate and dispute about, Paul says, don't do it.

The 2 illustrations that he brings to our attention has to do with diet, and days of the year. People making a big deal over what's acceptable to eat, and whether or not they're recognize certain days. and For the most part these aren't huge areas of debate in our culture (though they do exist). Some still adhere to strict dietary codes for what they believe to be spiritual reasons, some struggle with certain days of the year for the same reason. "What am I condoning if I celebrate Christmas? If my kids trick or treat am I supporting Satanism? Am I endorsing pagan practices if I allow my kids to have an Easter egg hunt?" and To be completely honest with you, in each of those examples, though I believe we should exercise wisdom, the bible doesn't address those particular subjects. We have to work those things out with fear and trembling *before* the Lord being personally persuaded *by* the Lord, and we're not to dispute our position and try to persuade every other believer we come in contact with according to our personal perspective.

But I would say that even more than diet, or days of the year, in our culture we might wrestle more with the ideas of say appropriate *dress*, what is or isn't acceptable attire for the child of God? It can make for a dispute, now we have clear cut parameters with respect to modesty, not dressing in a provocative manner sexually. But beyond that, what exactly is

“godly style?” Is all black material cut in gothic patterns Satanic, but if it’s cut to look like a suit with a tie to match it’s godly? Who’s to say? What makes one person’s opinion higher than another’s? You can dress like a cowboy, but not a punk rocker? You can pierce your ear, but not your nose, or perhaps the nose but definitely not the lip, who draws the line? You see these are areas of personal conviction, now if I feel a conviction to wear a shirt and tie on Sunday, but you’re ok with a T-shirt and jeans, what gives me the right to impress my standards upon you? I can’t find a biblical reason to do so, so Paul says don’t debate it, don’t dispute over it, just receive one another despite your difference of opinion regarding it.

Diversions would be another point of contention in the Christian arena, how do you entertain yourself outside these walls? Do you go to movies? What’s your personal hobby? What’s your outlet recreationally? I know a guy who used to paint those little pewter figures, wizards and 3 headed dragons, castles and all that. and One of his big hang ups with Christianity was that he was convinced that if he came to Christ he’d have to give that up. I told him not worry about what man thinks, worry about what God thinks and that if the Lord wanted him to give it up he’d let him know. Over time he wound up giving his heart to Christ, and in his case he did eventually let that go, but not because anyone told him to, he was just personally persuaded by the Lord. What about tattoos? These are hot points of debate within the church.

Even *disciplines*, how much time do you spend in the Word? Do you pray everyday, and if so how long? What’s your degree of active involvement in the church? So you can see that there are all kinds (and we didn’t hit them all) of doubtful things that are disputed over in the church. But the exhortation here is that we not *wrestle* one another, but *receive* one another.

Vs2-3

Now this is sorta shocking and surprising to us at 1st glance because (check it out) Paul places the bro/or sister that adheres to a more strict set of disciplinary actions in the category of the weaker individual. The one who watches his diet, is careful to honor or avoid certain days. He says, “One believes he can eat whatever, but the one who’s weak eats only vegetables.”

But here’s the catch 22 the one who enjoys his liberty has a tendency to despise the one who’s a little tenser. and The one who’s stricter in his point of view has a tendency to judge the one who enjoys the liberty. So that one guy is all, “That guy is bound up in legalism and self righteousness.” and The other is, “That guy is irresponsible, irreverent and perhaps immoral, he’s just wrong.” You see the liberated brother is tempted to look upon his brother that’s a bit legalistic as rigid, and too restricted to be of any real use to the Lord. But the legalist is tempted to look upon the liberated brother as being too unrestricted, and undisciplined to serve Christ effectively. Hence you have the horns of a dilemma.

There are subtle dangers for each of them. The one who is strong is often faced with the temptation to push their freedom in Christ to its limits, to live on the outer edge, and see how far they can go without actually committing a sin. As to where the weaker individual is so afraid of committing some religious offense that they surround themselves with myriads of self-

imposed restrictions and regulations; and generally the weak one considers himself the stronger. Because of all the disciplines they subject themselves to, and legalism has this way of making us think we're more spiritual and more mature than others because they don't adhere to the pious standards that we do.

In that day there were all kinds of pagan temples around, and on the other side of the temple would be a meat market. and Some folks didn't have an issue with eating a K.C. strip regardless of where it came from. But others with a weaker conscience would feel violated because perhaps it had been offered to an idol, some demonic figure or something. In 1st Cor Paul would say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, but God will destroy them both." In other words, food, is food, is food, God's not concerned about it we all need to eat, however if it bothers your conscience than don't eat it.

But here's the deal, we've got to be careful when we begin to form our perspectives of the liberties, or legal trips of a brother or a sister, why? Because God has received him, now if God has received him, but we despise and reject them, than we've placed a higher standard on someone than the Lord. God says, "Do you believe in Jesus? Have you received Him as the substitutionary sacrifice for your sin? 'Yes,' than I receive you." Now if God has received them, than who am I to despise or reject them?

Vs4

Have you ever noticed that God will bless the lives of people that you disagree with? and We think, "How is that possible, I know my life is more pleasing to God than theirs is!" But God is working in their life, in the early days of my own walk with God, if you only knew some of the stupid things Jody and I did. We were total dummies, rarely serious, a lost cause for the stereo typical picture of healthy Christianity and definitely no hope for a candidate in ministry, yet God has made us to stand, and made you to stand.

So the question, "Who are you to judge another's servant?" I don't serve you directly, and you don't serve me directly, we serve the Lord specifically. The point here being that my personal assessment of you, and your personal assessment of me doesn't in any way, shape or form, impact or affect my standing before the Lord. God is the One who is to govern me, guide me, lead me by the conviction of His Holy Spirit. I'm not to be governed by your personal convictions but God's personal convictions for me, and the same is true for you. Now again I want to qualify that statement. This is not saying, "Hey man back off me about this immorality issue, who are you to judge another man's servant?"

In the case of clear commands from the Word of God, or in the case of things clearly condemned in the Word of God, that's not judging anybody. That's agreeing and adhering to the principles and precepts of God's Word, those things apply to *every* believer with out exception. The context here is specifically delegated to debatable issues of which the Word of God doesn't address. This isn't saying don't call sin, "sin." If I'm in sin, let me know, lovingly,

tenderly, biblically/contextually, but in the matters of personal conviction you adhere to the conviction upon *your* heart, and let the other brother or sister work it out between them and God. and If we're busy as God's servants, serving the Lord, we're not going to be inclined to judge and condemn one another. It's been said that the one who's busy winning souls for Christ have more important things to do than to investigate the lives of the saints. Now it's not saying that we can't simply let someone know our opinion, or offer some advice that's all fine and well, but we're not to press the issue beyond that to seek to cause people to conform to our personal set of standards. Notice.

Vs5

I don't want to sound like a broken record here but we need to realize that this isn't saying simply, "Let your conscience be your guide." Because at times our conscience can guide us straight into carnal gratification, "Well God created everything so I guess it's all good! I'm fully convinced God's ok with me smoking this big ol' joint!" Wrong, and God speaks clearly to that position in His Word, whether its drug abuse, or alcohol abuse, God clearly condemns it. Because those things alter your perception, your ability to discern between holy and unholy, your frame of mind is warped. Remember there in Lev Ch 10 Nadab and Abihu? There they were at the dedication of the tabernacle, Aaron blessing the people, offering the sacrifice, the glory of the Lord appeared and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the sacrifice. and When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. I mean it was a happenin scene, a heavy time of worship, and in the excitement of the moment, the adrenaline flowing, the fanfare was so exciting, Nadab and Abihu the sons of Aaron took their censor, put fire in it, placed incense on it and offered "profane fire" before the Lord. and Fire went out from before the Lord and devoured them and they died right there in the sight of everybody. and Moses spoke the word of the Lord to Aaron saying, "*By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.*" Lev 10:3 and So Aaron held his peace, but what does that mean? Well we're given a bit of insight just after that when the Lord spoke to Aaron and said, "*Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean,*" Lev 10:9-10 and Of course you could reference 1st Cor 6, Gal 5 and many other passages that deal with such issues. So it's not a free for all based upon the allowance of the conscience. This is simply saying that where the bible is silent, we need to seek God's heart individually, and be convinced personally of our path.

Vs6

What's this saying? Placed in short this is saying that both of you, if you've trusted Christ, whether you take a more legal stance, or a liberated position, you're both doing what you're doing for the same reason ultimately, and that's to bring God glory. In either leading a

life of freedom for the world to see, or in setting up strict safeguards to just honor God with your life personally, so acknowledge the mutual aim and move on.

Vs7-9

Now there are those who use Vs 7 to say and show how our life impacts and affects everyone around us either to the positive or the negative. and That's true. But though that's an application we can make, it's not an accurate interpretation of this Vs in its context. The bottom line is that this is saying that we are not our own, we've been bought at a price, the price of the shed blood of Jesus Christ and we belong to Him in both life and death. and That's another big reason that we have contention in the body is because we all think we've got to be the Holy Spirit for someone else instead of just letting the Lord, be the Lord in someone's life. I need to trust that my God is big enough that if you're out of line, and you love Him and are seeking Him, He's able to let you know. Meanwhile I should just commit the situation to prayer and trust the Lord's direction for your life.

A great illustration of this is after Jesus restored Peter on the beach after His resurrection. and The Lord told Peter that when he was old, another would gird him and lead him where he didn't want to go (in reference to his martyrdom). Peter looks at John and says, "What about him?" and We read that, "*Jesus said to him, 'If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.'*" John 21:22 Translation: "Don't worry about what I'm working out in his life, or the way in which I'm working it out, you follow me. Let *Me* be Lord of his life, you just worry about *Me* being the Lord of *Your* life." So the next time you hear another believer speaking critically, or in a condescending or condemning way about another believer for a difference of opinion that's neither essential or forbidden by the Word, try that one out. Say, "What's that to you, you follow Christ, let *Him* worry about them and be the Lord of their lives, you just worry about Jesus being the Lord of *your* life."

Vs10-12

What's the point here? That we have plenty on our plate with out having to worrying about our brother or our sister's perspective. We're not going to have to give an account for *their* lives, only our own, so we're to focus on what God's placed on our hearts and not concern ourselves with someone else's persuasion on non-essential matters. Oh we don't have to account for our sin (Praise the Lord) that was judged on the cross. But concerning what we've done, why we've done it, the motive behind our works, things of that nature.

Pray for your brothers, pray for your sisters, but let the Lord, be the Lord, don't dispute over doubtful things, and instead of judging the lives of others, be circumspect of your own, be careful to honor the convictions that God has placed on *your* heart. and Trust that God is able to deal with the details in their life just as adequately as He deals with you. There are bigger fish to fry my friends, over 150,000 people are plunging into eternity everyday, how many of them

know Jesus? So God help us to get our critical eyes off the saints, and take to our knees on the behalf of the souls that so desperately need Jesus. Eternity is an awfully long time, so if you know Jesus, man praise the Lord, God will knock the rough spots off us, meanwhile lets get the gospel out to them.

Prayer Points: God help us to trust You to be the Lord of the lives of our brothers and sisters rather than concerning ourselves, disputing, and dividing over doubtful things. Turn our eyes upon You as opposed to one another and may we glean Your heart in getting the gospel out to a hurt and dying world rather than majoring on these otherwise minor issues. May we receive one another, not argue with one another and may we endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, for Your glory and for Your names sake.

If you're here and you've never given your heart to Christ, you've been sitting here and soaking up information as to how Christians are to deal with controversy. But before you can worry about making peace with those around you, you need 1st to experience peace with God. and That peace is offered to you, extended to you by the blood of Jesus Christ shed upon the cross of Calvary. Jesus laid down His life *for* you, and extends the offer of the forgiveness of your sins *to* you, but He won't force Himself *upon* you, you've got to open the door of your heart and invite Him in, let me encourage you to do that today.