

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation
TITLE: When Christians Disagree

SCRIPTURE: Romans 14:1-12

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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

It's a fact, *different Christians have different opinions about a lot of different things*. Things like not going to movies, not listening to rock music, no dancing, women not wearing pants, men not having their hair touch their collars, no tattoos, no beards, no playing cards, no smoking, no drinking in moderation, no Bible except the KJV, no contemporary music in church, only hymns, the frequency of communion, Halloween, Christmas, Easter—the list seems endless. These things were and still are in some circles very serious matters. These kinds of things split churches, tear families apart, and the mean-spiritedness of Christians who disagree over these things have even caused some people to walk away from the church and from their faith altogether.

Just to clarify, we're not talking about *essential fundamental doctrines* and things that are *clearly spelled out as right and wrong in the Bible*—adultery, immorality, sex outside of marriage, lying, murder, stealing, coveting, getting drunk, gossiping, slandering. If the Bible specifically calls something a sin then it's a sin and it's not up for debate. But there are other things—you might call them "secondary matters"—like the ones I just ticked off that tick Christians off when they run into other so-called Christians who don't hold to the same convictions they do in these things.

The question is: What should your attitude be toward believers who practice their faith in Christ differently than you? That's the question Paul is dealing with in Romans 14:1-15:7. The problem is Christians in the Roman church are passing judgment on fellow believers in these secondary, "disputable matters." Those Paul calls *weak* don't understand that they've elevated a secondary matter and made it a primary matter—the *weak* don't see as "disputable" what Paul says the *strong* are free to enjoy.

Weak and Strong — Those whom Paul calls "*weak*" have *strict* consciences about these matters. Others who Paul calls "*strong*" (15:1)—*and Paul includes himself in the "strong" camp*— are those who have freedom of conscience. That is, their conscience doesn't condemn them if they participate in a particular disputable matter.

The *weak* are people whose consciences condemn them if they participate in a disputable matter they believe is wrong. They do not have the faith to believe *that they have the freedom* to participate in a disputable matter. *If they participate, their conscience condemns them.*

The *strong* are people whose conscience does not condemn them in a disputable matter. They have faith that they have the freedom to participate in a disputable matter. The disputable matters in the church had to do with eating meat; keeping the Sabbath (14:5) and other Jewish holy days; and drinking wine (14:20). The *weak* did not eat meat or drink wine primarily because they could not be certain it was kosher. They were saved by grace—they were not *weak* in *saving faith*—but because of their upbringing they still felt

bound to Jewish dietary laws and holy days. They felt that doing and not doing things in line with the law made them more acceptable to God.

In the practical outworking of this passage, you might see four categories of weak and strong.

Immature, Weak: "This is wrong for me and it's wrong for you." *There's no disputing this--it's wrong!*

Mature, Weak: "Others may. I may not." *For me, it's wrong, but I understand that other Christians see it differently.*

Mature, Strong: "I enjoy my freedom, but at times, out of love for the weak, I don't exercise my freedom."

Immature, Strong: "I have freedom and if you don't like what I'm doing that's your problem."

I also think that under the mature, strong category you can have people who say, "I know I have freedom, but for personal reasons, I don't ever exercise that freedom" because it's a wisdom issue.

The main thing is, in these disputable matters, *each one must be convinced in his own mind* (14:5). That means, in these disputable matters there's no one correct position. Something could be right for one person and wrong for another. And that's exactly what Paul is saying here in Romans 14, and that's why he's spending so much time on this subject. In 14:1-12—Paul focuses more on the weak. In 14:13-21 he focuses on the strong. ... In 14:1-12 he gives us ...

Three Principles for Navigating Disputable Matters

(1) Welcome those who _____ with you (14:1; cf 15:7).

(2) Don't _____ on those who differ with you (14:2-3a).

(3) Remember, those you think are wrong in disputable matters answer to _____, not _____ (14:3b-12).

Main Application: We are to practice " _____ grace." (15:7; from Tim Keller)

For Discussion

Have someone read Romans 14:1-12.

1. What are some things in your religious upbringing in the church where you saw early on that different Christians have different opinions about? ... What were some of the "disputable matters" Christians disagreed over?
2. What was the problem in the church of Rome?
3. Who were the weak? ...Who were the strong? ...Who was right and who was wrong? ...
4. Why did some Jewish Christians not eat meat or drink wine? ...Why did Paul classify them as weak?
5. What is the hardest thing about "welcoming" people who disagree with you over these disputable matters?
6. How can you make judgments without passing judgment?
7. What is "receptive grace?" ... What works against you graciously receiving a fellow Christian who is stricter than you or freer than you?