

## SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation

TITLE: "When Christians Disagree (Part 3)"

SCRIPTURE: Romans 14 Remix

DATE: October 21, 2018

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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!

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We are in the last part of the book of Romans—in a four-part mini-series entitled, "When Christians Disagree"—and we're looking at how we're to live with and love fellow believers who come from different background and traditions—who have different personalities and different personal convictions about what the apostle Paul calls "disputable matters" (14:1 NIV). ...As we've seen over the last two weeks, different Christians have different opinions about all kinds of things like—Sabbath-keeping, movies, drinking alcohol in moderation, political party affiliation, Halloween, Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, yoga, tattoos, military service—and there are 100s more. Again, we're not talking about the indisputable matters of fundamental doctrines or things clearly defined as right or wrong in the Bible—adultery, stealing, murder, gossip, lying, coveting, getting drunk, sex outside marriage, etc. We're talking about issues where good, Bible-believing, Jesus-loving people disagree.

The question in Romans 14 is: How can Christians whose beliefs, practices, values, and views differ from one another in these "gray" areas get along with one another in the same church? And to take it one step further—How do we as followers of Jesus navigate the complex waters of personal convictions and love?

It's true we've spent two weeks in ch.14, but there's still some meat left on the bones that I think we need to chew on. You may remember that the two main disputable matters that divided the church in Rome were eating meat and drinking wine that wasn't kosher and strict observance of the Jewish Sabbath and other Jewish holy days (read 14:2 and 5). Paul calls the Jewish Christians with a stricter conscience "weak" and the non-Jews with a more free conscience "strong." Now, the strong in faith do not necessarily please God any more than the weak in faith. Both can honor God and both can sin against God. But in these issues of weak and strong, who's right and who's wrong? (read 14:14, 15:1; 1 Cor 8:4-8). According to Paul, the "strong" are right because what they believe is more in line with the Gospel and the truth of Scripture than the "weak" whose conscience is ruled by their "former associations" (1 Cor 8:7).

But here's the deal—Paul does not tell the weak to grow up and chuck their personal convictions (even though I'm sure he wants that for them). Why not? Because of the issue of conscience. A main cause of the division in the church had to do with the conscience. And how you handle your conscience is a big deal.

Paul is basically saying—*It's better to follow a mistaken conscience than to violate your conscience.* You see things—you hear things—you make judgments about things. Your conscience is your God-given moral

judge. It's your moral judgments turned in on yourself. Your conscience constantly judges what you say and what you do—accusing and excusing you (cf Rom 2:13-15). Your conscience is your consciousness of what you believe is right and wrong. It's black and white—it doesn't do "gray" very well. The reason your conscience is such a big deal is because if you sin against your conscience in what you believe is right and wrong—then over time—you can desensitize your conscience and set a trajectory for your life where you end up where you never thought you would be. It is a very dangerous thing to go against your conscience even if your conscience is mistaken, overly sensitive, or overly strict. That said...

You should be willing to recalibrate your conscience so it comes more in line with the teaching of Scripture. That means—and this is my One Big Idea—the one piece of meat still clinging to the bone that I want to look at this morning—we need to—**Make judgments without passing judgment** (145:5-6, 14, 22-23).

*First: Make judgments based on what the Bible says.* "My conscience is captive to the Word of God" (Martin Luther). That means, if God call something a sin, it's a sin. (Read Romans 13:13-14 for a list of clearly defined sins). However, if the Bible doesn't call something a sin, don't call it a sin. Make judgments for yourself, but don't pass judgment on those who don't follow your conscience standards. That means, logical reasons for not doing something do not make that thing a sin. Logical reasons for not doing something do not equal a biblical prohibition. You will not prevent people from falling into sin by being stricter than God. However, logical reasons do call for you to think wisely about all these disputable issues (1Cor 10:23).

*Second: Make judgments by applying godly wisdom in your choices.* It may not be wise for you to do what you are free to do. You develop wisdom by asking yourself questions like— *If in this area, there can be serious "one thing leads to another" consequences for me, then is it worth the risk?* You think this through for you, not someone else. *Is it profitable? Will it encourage my walk with God? Is it simply self-serving? Is it something that I can honestly say that honors God? Is this something I can thank God for?* These kinds of questions help you make wise choices—and again—you may answer these questions one way but another believer may answer them differently and you need to get comfortable with that. *That's the whole point of these chapters! Every believer should make judgments without passing judgment.* Every believer needs to develop their own personal convictions about these disputable matters and teach them to their children. It is wise to talk about how different Christians hold different views on some of these things and why your family makes the choices you make without passing judgment on those who make different choices—it is wise and it's biblical. In 14:13—Paul states his main point clearly—Therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another...

*Third: By all means, follow your conscience* (14:14b,23 and 22). If you go against your conscience when you think it's warning you correctly—it's always a sin in God's eyes—*always*—even if the action is not a sin in and of itself. And I would say—it should scare you to think of the consequences of sinning against your conscience. You don't want to go down the path from a weak conscience to a wounded conscience to a willfully-callous conscience to no conscience at all. Luther was right—"To go against your conscience is neither right nor safe."

*Make judgements for yourself without passing judgment on others who hold different opinions than you in disputable matters.*

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*For Discussion —*

Have different people read through each paragraph of the Sermon Notes Summary above and also read the Scriptures that are given in parenthesis.

From what you heard in Charlie's message or what we just read right here:

1. *What are some of the "AHAs" you had?*
2. *What did you hear that resonated with you?*
3. *What new thoughts and insights did you have?*

When someone volunteers an "AHA" ask follow up questions to dig deeper and to keep the discussion going. Ask the group, *"Anyone else have this same "AHA"? What do you think about this insight?"* After you've exhausted topic, throw the original question back out to the group, *"Who else had an "AHA?"*

Repeat the pattern above.

If someone says, *"I didn't really have an "AHA," it's more that I don't understand ...."* Then go that direction. Ask follow up questions to help them clearly articulate the issue. *"Anybody else think about that/struggle with that?"* Ask the group for input, *"So, how would you answer that question?"* Whoever answers, ask follow up questions, ask for input from the group on that answer (*What do you think about that?*).

It's been my (Charlie) experience that you can have a great discussion around this approach to community group conversations.