

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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## Romans 14:1-13a      “When Christians Disagree”

Intro. Disunity & conflict has always been a significant problem in the world, and God’s people have not been immune to this problem. It was a problem among the disciples of Jesus. It was a problem in the New Testament church. The Corinthians were divided. The Galatians were “biting and devouring” one another (5:15). The church in Rome evidently had some trouble with disunity. Rome was cosmopolitan and so was the church there. There were evidently differences between Jews & Gentiles in the church, especially in what they believed were proper and improper practices.

The church today is divided into many denominations. Individual churches face the problem of divisions. One reason for this is the fact that people are different, in spite of our common salvation. Diversity is often good in some respects. But it tends to bring about clashes among believers. Some people have been saved fifty years; others have been saved less than a year. Some come from irreligious backgrounds. Some come from legalistic fundamental churches; others come from churches that are more liberal. Christians disagree over what kind of music is proper in the church, or what is proper to listen to at home. Christians disagree whether it is OK to drink alcohol in moderation. Many Christians go to movies these days, some don’t. Among those who do go to movies, we may disagree over what rating is acceptable for a Christian to view. Christians disagree over the role of women in certain offices of the church. I could go on and on, but you get the idea.

Most of the issues that Paul addresses here in our text are not hot-button issues today, but I would say that we still disagree over such issues in their modern form. In the early church they disagreed over dietary issues. The Christians that understood their liberty in Christ felt that they could eat all kinds of foods. They believed that Old Testament dietary laws were no longer in effect. They could even eat meat that was sold in the marketplace that most likely came from an idol sacrifice. Many Jewish Christians were not so liberated, and some Gentiles were sensitive about having anything to do with their pagan past. And so some, according to v.2, chose to eat only vegetables. Then in v.5 we see that they disagreed over observances of special days. Many Jewish Christians still clung to the Sabbath observance. They may have felt that Christians should continue to observe other special days, such as Passover & Pentecost.

These disagreements are still with us today. I remember a time when we would always have fish on Friday in deference to Catholic belief & practice. Yet we Baptists eat just about anything on any day of the week. We Baptists don’t agree with the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists over the Sabbath observance or keeping Old Testament dietary laws. Among Baptists we may disagree over what is proper on Sunday. Some call Sunday the Sabbath, and do not work or shop on Sunday. Others treat Sunday as any other day of the week, except they add coming to church as part of their weekly routine. In our day, many Catholics & traditional Protestants observed Ash Wednesday this past week. That is the beginning of Lent, which they observe by abstaining from certain sins or practices. We Baptists tend to fall in the category of the last part of v.5, we esteem every day alike. We believe we should abstain from sin all year long. We believe every day is to be lived for the Lord.

Most of us feel pretty sure that our position on each of these issues is the right position. Others hold the opposite position, and feel just as sure they are right. Yet people with differing views have to get along in the church. There is something wrong when we fight over secondary issues, and do not practice the most important commandment, and that is to love one another.

So what do we do when we disagree over issues that are not clearly spelled out in the New Testament? How can we disagree with other believers, without resulting in arguments, hurt feelings, rejection, church splits, withdrawing fellowship, and a host of other problems? As I have studied the text, I have found that Paul gives 4 basic commands in this text that we are to obey in our dealings with one another over such matters. First of all:

## I. DON'T JUDGE OTHER BELIEVERS WHEN THEY DISAGREE

Paul says in the middle of v.3, "Let not him who does not eat judge him who eats." This is so important that Paul concludes this section by reaffirming this command in v.13 saying, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore." Colossians 2:16-17 says "Let no man, therefore, judge you in food, or in drink, in respect of a feast day, or of the new moon, or of a Sabbath day, which are a shadow of things to come." Many Jews in the early church taught that both Jews & Gentiles had to live by the laws and rituals of the Old Testament. They tended to judge those who did not fall in line with their beliefs and practices.

Let me give an example of a modern day situation. In light of v.5, some believers would say that Christians shouldn't play golf or go fishing on Sunday, even if it is in the afternoon after church. Let's suppose that you believe that. But in light of the verses I just read to you, are you going to judge that fellow church member for playing golf on Sunday afternoon? Should you?

Paul gives a series of arguments as to why we should not judge other believers over such questionable issues. First of all:

A. You Are Not Their Judge - Paul says in v.4, "Who are you to judge another's servant?" The "You" in this verse is emphatic. It was as if Paul was pointing his finger at someone and saying, "You, who are you to judge..." He went on to point out that you are both servants of the same Lord. He questioned any believer's right to evaluate someone else's servant.

Suppose a man invited me to dinner and served me a meal that was very highly spiced. Would it be my place to state, "Your cook uses too much seasoning. This food is terrible!" He might answer, "I tried five cooks till I found one who seasoned it to suit me. This is the way I like it." No Christian and no pastor can please every other Christian in every way. Our main responsibility is to please the Lord.

So remember, it is not your place to judge a fellow Christian. Rather:

B. It Is Christ's Responsibility to Judge - Paul said in vv.10-11, "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: 'As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.'" Here is the main reason for dropping this incessant criticism of one another. That other believer does not answer to you, but to the Lord. You are not his judge; Christ is! The judgment of believers will take place at the Judgment Seat of Christ. In fact, the word translated "judgment seat" (*bema*) was used of the place where the judges stood at the athletic games. At the end of the contests, the judges gave out the rewards. At the end of this present age, we Christians will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Thus, Paul says in 1

Cor. 4:3-5, “With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, ...but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God.” It is to God each will render account, not to men. Furthermore, he says in v.12, “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” When you stand before the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ, you will give an account for no one but yourself. Note, it is “of himself,” not of the conduct of others.

One reason we should leave judgment to the Lord is that only He can judge motives properly. Paul’s point in v.6 is that even though the practices of the strong and weak vary, their motives are the same. Why does a weak believer keep the law and tradition? Because he believes in his heart that he is pleasing the Lord. Why does the strong believer enjoy the freedom he’s been given in Christ? Because he believes in his heart that he is pleasing the Lord. Only the Lord can discern a person’s true motives.

The story is told that Babe Ruth was at bat and Babe Pinelli was the umpire behind the plate. The first pitch was a swing and a miss, as was the second pitch. Babe Ruth digs in for the next pitch. The pitcher winds up and delivers, and Ruth doesn’t move. From behind the plate the umpire cries out, “Strike three!” Ruth gets in Pinelli’s face and says, “There’s 40,000 people here who know that last one was a ball, tomato head.” Pinelli takes a look around the stadium, then responds to Ruth, “Maybe so, but mine is the only opinion that counts. The batter’s out!”<sup>1</sup>

No matter what you think, no matter what anyone in the world thinks — God’s opinion is the only one that matters.

Furthermore, you are not to judge other believers for:

C. It Is Christ’s Responsibility to Keep Them in Line - Paul says in v.4, “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.” In the last part of this verse Paul mentioned the belief that some Christians were falling away from Christ. The weak tended to regard the exercise of liberty on the part of the strong as a falling down in their devotion to Christ. But Christ is able to help them maintain a right relationship to Him. Later in this letter, in 16:25 he says, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ....” Jude 24 says, “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling.” 1 Peter 1:5 says that we “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” We can trust God to keep a true Christian in line. He has given us the Holy Spirit, who convicts us when we get out of line. He has given us His Word to guide us. If you can fall away from the Lord, and live for years out of fellowship with God & His church, then you had better consider if you are even saved.

So if you see a believer that is doing something that you think is probably wrong, instead of jumping on them with condemnation, pray for them. Trust God to bring conviction to their hearts.

Finally, we should not judge another believer because:

D. The Other Believer May Be Right – In this text some in the church were judging other believers over eating meat, or because they did not observe certain religious holy days as they did. Yet Paul defends them in this text. He refers to those who exercise Christian liberty as “strong,” and those who don’t as “weak” in our text. The strong believer is one who is well-grounded in the principles of the Christian faith, and knows how to apply those principles to

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<sup>1</sup> Told by Jerry Sutton, *A Simple Guide to the Way Back Home* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002).

daily living. Such believers don't cling to meaningless traditions and legalistic forms of religion. In v.1 we see that other believers are weak "in the faith." The definite article is present. He is not weak in saving faith but in the faith necessary to believe he is free. Such a person does not understand the full implications of the Christian faith, which included Christian liberty.

Furthermore, he says in the middle of v.6, "He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks." Likewise, Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:4, "Every creature of God is good and nothing is to be refused, if it is received with thanksgiving." Acts 10:15 says, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." 1 Cor. 8:8 says, "Food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse." So the strong believer is right; you can eat anything that is not clearly injurious to your body. So far as foods are concerned, we are taught again and again that the dietary laws of the Old Testament have been abolished. Heb. 7:12 indicates that with Jesus there was a change in priesthood. Since that is true, there is also a change of law.

Yet, he also defends the believer who, for conscience sake, decides to be a vegetarian. In the last of v.6 he says, "He who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks." He is credited with an equal sense of devotion to Christ, and he likewise gives thanks.<sup>2</sup>

As for the observance of special days and seasons, who is right? Here in this text, Paul does not say. But he wrote in Galatians 4:9-11, "How is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain."

So drop unnecessary criticism. Let the Lord be the judge. It's better that we should love one another.

Now what happens when we judge people? We tend to violate the next two commands of our text:

## II. DON'T REJECT ANOTHER BELIEVER OVER SUCH DISAGREEMENTS

Paul states this in the positive form in v.1 saying, "Receive one who is weak in the faith...." If there is to be loving unity among believers; it must begin with the strong. Paul insisted that the weak must be treated gently. Paul says that we are to receive the weak in faith. "Receive" means "to take to oneself" and is preceded by the preposition *pros*, which intensifies its meaning. It can have the meaning of "welcome." It is the opposite of rejecting them. In fact, those who believed in expressing their liberty in Christ may have wanted to exclude or reject from membership those who differed. The purpose of receiving weaker believers is to love them. We must love them and not do anything to offend them. As we shall see next week, the strong must be willing to sacrifice their liberties. No genuine fellowship exists where some are made to feel that they must pass a test to gain full acceptance.

In the last of v.1 Paul warns us not to receive another believer into our church group for the wrong reason. He says, "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things<sup>3</sup>." This can be translated, "Not for the purpose of quarreling in regard to opinions." Paul knew the strong would often receive the weak for the purpose of converting them

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<sup>2</sup> The change from "for he gives God thanks" to "and gives God thanks" is striking. The former states a reason; the latter is a statement of fact.

<sup>3</sup> This comes from *diakriseis dialogismon*. The first word has a root meaning of choosing between two things, hence to doubt, or to quarrel about a decision with your self or someone else. The second word means "a thought, opinion, reasoning."

to their position, which would result in quarrels. But we are not to quarrel about issues that are matters of opinion.

Paul gives one main reason why we are not to judge & reject another believer in the last of v.3, “for God has received him.” Back in Acts 10 we see that God accepted the Gentile Cornelius just as he was. He did not have to become a Jew and live by Jewish law before He would receive him as a born-again Christian. It is sinful for us to reject those whom God has accepted.

Our text forbids the belief that an individual must subscribe to certain secondary doctrines before he can be received into the church. We must not demand that they believe exactly the same as we do in terms of personal convictions. We do wrong to try to make people into identical robots.

### III. DON'T TREAT OTHERS WITH CONTEMPT

In v.3 the apostle places his finger on the vice so liable to be indulged by the respective groups. He says, “Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat....” The strong would have the tendency to despise or treat the weak with contempt. Likewise, Paul says in the last of v.10, “Or why do you show contempt for your brother?” The word literally means that you regard someone as nothing, as a zero, as having no brain. The Christian who is strong in their faith would have the tendency to despise the immaturity of the weak. Such an attitude comes from spiritual pride. We are not to put on the air of superiority as we discuss our differences of opinion. Such pride is one of the most serious sins you can commit. It was the sin of the devil. So instead of treating those with whom we disagree with contempt, we must be patient for the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and the community of believers to bring the weak to maturity.

Down through the centuries of Christian history, there have been many zealous souls who have fought hard against other believers over points of doctrine and Christian practice. Yet while they have tried to convince others of the rightness of their convictions, they have often violated the more important commandments, such as the commandment to love, and the commandment to walk humbly before their God. Let us know make the same mistake!

Once we understand that the Lord has not appointed us to judge and reject other believers over questionable beliefs and practices, then we are ready for his final appeal:

### IV. FOLLOW YOUR OWN CONSCIENCE, & LET OTHERS FOLLOW THEIRS<sup>4</sup>

We have seen that Jesus is Lord, and He is our judge. We are accountable to obey Him. So the command in the last part of v.5 is very important, “Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.” Right and wrong should be decided by our own conscience as trained by the Word of God, not by our neighbor's conscience. Paul said to do whatever you think you ought to do. He is concerned that people not train themselves to violate their consciences. There is no moral wrong in eating meat, but there is moral harm in violating conscience. The Spirit of God leads subjectively through a person's conscience.

Paul gives an example of this principles in v.6, “He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.” Here we are taught that a Sabbatarian has the right to observe the seventh

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<sup>4</sup> This sermon is long as is. May want to save the material of pt. IV for the next sermon.

day if he believes that God wants him to. We should also be free to follow our conscience in regard to diet. Paul clearly indicates in the last of v.6 that both parties, by the line of action they choose, have the same end in view – namely, the interest of the Lord.

In vv.7-9 Paul argues why we should live according to our own conscience. He says, “For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.” By the death and resurrection of Christ, He entered into a new sphere of Lordship. Before He was Lord by virtue of being Creator. Here He is Lord by virtue of redemption. We should obey Christ because of His sacrificial love for us. The last phrase of v.8, “we are the Lord’s” is one of the greatest in junctions to holy living in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, “Do you not know that...you are not your own? For you were bought at a price.” And nothing is more basic than the lordship of Christ in the believer’s life.

Kim, a Korean layman of wealth and prominence, was elected elder in one of the Presbyterian churches in Pyongyang, the chief city of northern Korea. Because of his outstanding character and reputation, he was asked to address the annual meeting of the General Assembly of the church during one of the morning devotional periods. He began modestly, reminding his hearers that he was a simple layman, not trained in a seminary or Bible institute. He was not going to preach or attempt to teach, but he wished to put before them a great problem, and to ask their advice for its solution.

“A year or two ago,” he began, “I received a letter from a friend of mine in Seoul. He was a young dentist and wanted to establish himself in P’yongyang. He asked me to find a place that would be suitable for his home and office combined. Now we all know that there is a great housing shortage, but I did all I could to help him. For three days I searched the town. Finally I found a place and wrote him about it. I told him that the house was in bad condition. The wall surrounding the place was in disrepair, there was a hole in the house wall, the roof leaked very badly. The house was in a very bad neighborhood. Next door there was a house that was inhabited by what were called “singing girls.” Furthermore, the price was exorbitant. In spite of this adverse report, my friend sent me a telegram telling me to buy the house. A day or so later I received a check for several thousand yen for the down payment, so I signed the papers to purchase the house. The down payment was made and the final payments were to be made in three days, at which time the owner agreed to vacate the house. The payments were made but the owner asked for a day or two more in order to find another house. I granted him this period of grace. But after a week he was still there. Two weeks, three weeks, a month, three months, six months have passed. The man who sold the house has bought new clothing for his family, and they are eating polished rice instead of the cheaper grains. He knows that I am a Christian and that in Korea we Christians never go to court against other Christians, and we try not to go to court against unbelievers. He laughs at me when I come.

“Now, Fathers and Brethren,” Elder Kim continued, “my friend is greatly embarrassed because his capital is tied up in this house, and he is in a very difficult position. What am I to do?”

Several of the members of the General Assembly responded. One pointed out that Elder Kim was not acting in his own behalf, but as an agent. Another pointed out that he was evidently dealing with a man who was a thief at heart. All agreed that Kim had the right to go to the authorities and ask for an eviction order. Kim asked for a show of hands, and all voted that he had the right to proceed legally.

Elder Kim concluded: “Thank you, Fathers and Brethren, for the way you have considered my problem. Before I sit down, I wish to draw one conclusion. Nineteen hundred years ago the Lord Jesus Christ came down from Heaven to purchase for Himself a dwelling place.” Then, striking his hand upon his breast, he continued, “He bought this old shack. It was in a rundown condition. It was in a bad neighborhood. He bought me because He wanted to take possession and dwell in my heart. He gave Himself for me, and He gave me the Holy Spirit as a down-payment on my inheritance, bringing me innumerable blessings with His redemption. But I cling to my tenement and leave Him outside. Now if you say that I have the right to seek the help of the authorities to evict the man who is occupying my friend’s house, what shall you and I say of ourselves when we deny the Lord Jesus the full possession of that for which He gave His own life?” (Barnhouse, pp. 190-191).

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 4, “God’s Discipline” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); Ronald A. Beers, ed., *Life Application Study Bible* (Tyndale House & Zondervan, 1991); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Stephen Felker, [\*Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible\*](#) (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2009; Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); John MacArthur, Jr., *Unity in Action: Study Notes on Romans 14:1-15:13* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). No material available from Maclaren.

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