

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JUNE 26TH-27TH, 2021 // BOOK OF ROMANS

DOUBTFUL THINGS (ROMANS 14:1-4)

The church in Rome was made up of Gentile & Jewish followers of Jesus.

- They were united by their faith in Christ, but Paul was able to detect an issue that was seriously harming their unity - disagreements over religious standards, convictions, and practices.
- The church is told to welcome the one who is "weak in faith" - spiritual maturity isn't a requirement for fellowship.

We all are in different places in our journey of following Jesus

- No matter where we are in our walk with Jesus, the church is to be a place for us to be "welcomed", but not so we can "quarrel over doubtful things".

The example Paul uses for "opinions" or "doubtful things" is the issue of eating meat (vs. 2).

- Most likely some in Rome abstained from meat because of their concern that it had been sacrificed to a pagan god (1 Cor. 8), while others might have refused it because it wasn't kosher.
- But other Christians saw nothing wrong with eating meat! The issue was that they were judging each other for their personal convictions.

Dialogismos - "Back-and-forth reasoning", opinions, doubtful things, disputed matters.

- Should a Christian drink alcohol or smoke, listen to secular music, go to the movies, gamble, or play the lottery?
- What's the Christian response to Covid-19 (Vax or Anti-Vax, Mask or Anti-mask?)
- How should Christians practice family planning or educate their children?

Paul isn't talking about issues that the Bible addresses specifically, or in principle (E.G., sexual immorality, dishonesty, violence or harm towards others).

- The topic is "gray areas" - where the scriptures are mostly silent and one could make the case Biblically for either position.

- We're told to not "despise" or "pass judgment" on those who hold different viewpoints (vs. 3).

Why? Because God has, "welcomed them" and we're not their master - God is (vs. 3b, 4).

- It's not our place to pass judgment on any fellow Christian because they stand or fall before their own Master-God.

- And at the end of the day, those who are "weak" in doubtful things God is still "able to make stand" - their difference of opinion over a doubtful thing has no bearing on their standing before God.

There is a lot of self-righteous, silly, and useless division among Christians over "doubtful things".

- We often use our convictions as reasons to feel superior over those who practice differently than us - but according to Paul, that makes us "weaker" in terms of spiritual maturity, not stronger (vs. 2b).
- We're also not told to erase our differences, but simply to rise above them and respect each other even when we disagree.

NO JUDGEMENT (ROMANS 14:5-12)

Paul again brings up this principle of personal convictions as it relates to the issue of which day of worship to observe.

- Some Jewish believers thought one should observe Shabbat on Saturdays, while Gentile believers wanted to worship God on Sunday (the "Lord's day") (vs. 5-6).
- Such issues should be left up to the conscience of the individual.

For "gray areas", we are to be "fully convinced in our own mind" that how we're practicing these things is in the "honor of the Lord" (vs. 5b).

- Paul is certainly NOT saying that we can use our conscience as an excuse for what the Bible clearly defines as sinful behavior.
- If we're born again, living in obedience to the Word, keeping in step with the Spirit, staying in Christian fellowship - we can trust our conscience as a guide for what honors God in these "gray areas".

Paul then reminds us that none of us, "lives to himself or dies to himself" (vs. 7) - "No man is an island", we are connected to other lives.

- First and foremost, we are committed, connected, and dedicated to the Lord (vs. 8, 12:1).

THE IMPLICATIONS ARE TWO-FOLD

1. In every decision we make, we do our best to honor the Lord.
2. We allow other believers the space to live their lives and make their decisions to honor the Lord.

"Passing judgment" or "despising" a brother for decisions they've made concerning personal convictions is a misunderstanding of the Christian life.

- **"Passing judgment"** is what we're tempted to do if we're the ones who are the strict observers of rules, as we view our brothers as unspiritual compromisers.
- **"Despising"** is what we're tempted to do if we feel free to not observe rules, as we view our brothers as uptight, legalistic, goody-two-shoes.

Both mindsets reveal a misunderstanding of the Christian life because we're all going to stand before "the judgment seat of God" (vs. 10) & give an account of ourselves to God (vs. 12).

- In other words, we need to stop worrying about how other Christians are walking out their faith.
- God will deal with our brother! That's not our place.

As believers in Jesus, we won't be judged for our sins, but we will stand before the "bema seat" of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) to give an account and receive rewards for what we've done in faithful service to Christ.

- During this time, Jesus will examine our lives and our work - not our brothers or sisters.

WALKING IN LOVE (ROMANS 14:13-19)

If the chapter ended here, we might get the impression that Paul is telling us to just leave each other alone and let the weak remain weak while we all just focus on our own personal walks with Jesus.

- We're encouraged as we walk out our faith to love, edify, build up, and not cause other Christians to stumble (vs. 13).

We might put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother by beating them down or discouraging them through legalism.

- But we also might do it through enticing them to sin through an unwise use of our liberty.
- If you're a parent, you need to be especially aware of this principle! Your decisions and how you live out your faith will deeply impact your children and how they live out their faith.

Even if we don't feel the least bit convicted about a certain activity and feel the liberty from the Lord to enjoy it, if we "grieve a brother" when we do it, we are no longer walking in love (vs. 14-15).

- If our actions with things like food or cigarettes, a can of beer, or a secular song, "destroy the one for whom Christ died", it's just not worth it.
- If Jesus was willing to give up His life for the sake of that brother, I can certainly give up my can of suds and my steak.

"Do not let your good be spoken of as evil" - our liberty in Jesus and freedom from the law is good, but if we use to destroy another brother in Christ, it could be spoken of as evil (vs. 16).

- If we place a higher priority on "eating and drinking" and doing whatever it is we want rather than on pursuing righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, we're not living for the Kingdom (vs. 17).

But when our aim in all things (even the SMALL matters of personal conviction) becomes serving Christ in this manner, we're acceptable to God and approved by men (vs. 18).

- In other words, God wants us to live our lives seeking to honor Him in all things while being aware that our all of decisions affect others.
- When we live with such awareness, we're "approved by men" in the sense that we enjoy fellowship, unity, and love in the body of Christ.

"So let us pursue what makes for peace" (vs. 19a) - let's do everything we can to not offend or hurt others who may be in a different place spiritually than ourselves.

- Let's watch how we live, what we say, what we post online, how we talk to each other, and our attitude towards, "gray areas"...we want others to GROW in Christ.

DON'T DESTROY GOD'S WORK (ROMANS 14:20-23)

If eating, drinking, smoking, watching, listening to, or doing anything will cause another brother or sister to stumble, then we are NOT free to eat or drink in that circumstance - we're destroying the "work of God" (vs. 20).

- It doesn't mean the activity is necessarily "unclean", but if by doing it you hurt someone else spiritually, it's wrong (vs. 20b, 21).

"The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God" (vs. 22a) - if you have strong faith, and feel liberty to partake in certain things, awesome!

- But keep that faith before God, not before a brother who will stumble if they see you do that.

"Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves" (vs. 22b) there are gray areas that God may challenge us to give up.

- It may not be that the thing is clearly good or bad, but it's just that God has called you to lay it down.
- But if we go on approving of these things in our lives when God through our conscience has called us to give them up, we pass judgment on ourselves.

The path to happiness and the blessed Christian life is not found in an attitude that says, "I'm saved, I'm going to heaven, I'm not committing any big sins - so I can just live however I want!"

- Real happiness is found living close to Jesus, staying in step with the Holy Spirit, and not being "condemned by what we approve".

A clear conscience before God and people is an incredible gift that leads to true, inner peace. If we take part in any activity that's "doubtful" and we can't do it in faith that it's pleasing to God - then it's sin (vs. 23).

- This is a check on our tendency to try and justify ourselves in the things that we permit.
- "...whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (vs. 23b) - in all that we do, we're to do it for God's glory; and if we can't do that activity for God's glory, we probably shouldn't do it.

UNITY.

Unity in the body of Christ matters more in achieving the mission of King Jesus than being right about everything.

- "Welcome Christians from all stages of their journey and **stop arguing** about matters of opinion." (vs. 1-4)
- In every decision are living for yourself or **living for the Lord** (vs. 8)? **Who gets the final say in the decisions you make?**
- Do you **"pass judgment" on or "despise"** other believers who live their Christian life differently than you?
- **God, is there anything in my life that I'm taking part in that you want me to lay down?** Am I passing judgment on myself for what I approve?" (vs. 20-23)