

## **Romans 14, 15 & 16**

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 29, 2018

Well, you can go ahead and turn in your Bibles to the book of Romans. And as you're doing that, if you're joining us for the first time today, you're catching us at the end of a series called The Book of Romans in Three Months, where we've been looking at the book of Romans over a three-month or a 13-week period of time. I'm sorry to say this is the end of it. I've really enjoyed the study, and I hope you have too. But this will be the final message.

This lasted for 13 weeks. I tried to make it 12 weeks, because 13 is kind of a funny number. It's not very Biblical. 12 is a good Biblical number. But we're coming to the end today. If you missed any of that, it's on the website. So, you can go check it out on our website - [gracefellowshipchilliwick.com](http://gracefellowshipchilliwick.com).

And also, since this is the last sermon in the series, I want to tell you what we're doing next. We've got an exciting month coming up. A lot of new things coming in the month of May. So, let me just kind of walk you through that quickly. Next Sunday, on May 6th, we're going to be having a Vision Sunday. We're going to be talking about the vision statement of Grace Fellowship Church.

When I was at Grace Advance Academy last summer, they had us put together a vision statement that talked about what we would like the church to be, and where we would like it to go (kind of a projection for the ministry here). And that's also on the website. But in response to the assignment, we're taking a few Sundays each year to actually look at this statement. And we looked at the first already. Next week, we'll look at the second which says this (this is the second part of our vision statement).

It says, "Because God's grace is so prevalent in the Bible, we are committed to emphasizing it in our worship. Colossians 3:16 says, 'Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom and teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,'" and we take that admonition seriously. As we hear the Word of God preached and taught, we respond to it in worship.

And it goes on to say more. But if you want to know how we're going to worship as a church, that's what we're talking about next week, if you want to know how we're going to proclaim grace through that. We'll also hear some testimonies from some of our members, about how much GFC has meant to them this past year. And you'll want to see that too.

The week after that, I'm going to be doing a follow up sermon to that, to say more about the topic of worship. And the week after that (this is something else new), on May 20th, Kevin Laser will be preaching for us. As many of you know, last year we started an Advisory Council, which is a group of men who meet regularly to give help and advice to the pastor. And one of their tasks is to be trained up to teach. We believe in a plurality of leadership here at Grace Fellowship. The pastor is not the CEO of the church. He's not the boss, or anything like that.

Which means he doesn't do all of the leading and teaching. I share that responsibility with other men.

And to show that, over the next year or so, we're going to have several men from our congregation preach to you. Kevin will be the first. He'll be bringing the Word of God to you, and he'll do a tremendous job. You don't want to miss that. That's on May 20th. Mark that on your calendars.

The following Sunday, May 27th, Richard Caldwell will be with us. And we said a few words about that. So, I won't say more, but all this is to say we've got a lot going on in the month of May. Our cup runneth over, and we're grateful for that. It's good to be busy in the church, amen?

So, for all two of you that are going to enjoy the month of May, please show up. The rest of you come back in June, and we'll be happy to see you there. It's good to be busy in the house of the Lord, amen? All right, good, good. I will make a Baptists out of you guys, yeah. I grew up in a Baptist Church, where we said "amen" every other word. So, all right. With that said, I want to dive right into our sermon for today, and kind of tie off the book of Romans with you. So, to do that, let's start with this.

Several years ago, the wife of a deceased minister made headlines in Michigan when she was arrested for trying to take over the pulpit of a local church. The video was posted on YouTube, and it quickly went viral. But apparently with her husband's death, the widow thought she should have control of the church. So, she tried to take it by force.

She came into the service, during the middle of the sermon and charged into the pulpit. When the officiating minister declined to let her in, she charged a second time and this time he called the police. At which point, she was put in handcuffs and escorted off the church property. Lawsuits soon followed, and nasty things were said in the press, but the church went on to lose half of its members over that. Today, I think it's close to closing its doors.

Now, that's a strong example of this. But I mention that to say that churches fight, don't they? I don't have to tell you guys that. We all know that. Christians fight. It's not always so public, it's not always so messy, but we have a long history of not getting along. It's been said if you get ten Christians in a room, you'll get 50 different opinions, and a fight on your hands. Which is sad because it's causing many churches to dry up. Like that church in Detroit, they're losing their testimony.

I did a little research on this, and several years ago the Gospel Coalition did a conference called the State of the Church in Canada. It was held in Cambridge, Ontario. D. A. Carson (who's Canadian) and Tim Challies were some of the speakers. And to promote it, they gave the following statistics. They said that in 1900, 25% of Canadians were evangelical. So, if you lived in this country in 1900, 25% of people believed that Jesus was the Son of God, and that you had to be saved through faith in His name. One out of every four, a huge percent of the population.

In the 1980s, the number dropped to 8%. Only 8%. It's actually gone up since the '80s. But one reason for that drop in numbers, is because the church kept fighting. The evangelical church. The

church that believes that Jesus is the Son of God, and you have to be saved through faith in His name, could not get along with each other. And I could add to this, that we don't just fight over Jesus or over the gospel, we fight over everything, right? We fight over every little cause under the sun.

A popular blogger recently took a poll on this. And he asked his readers to tell him what their churches were fighting over. And so, they wrote back, and they said they were fighting over the length of the pastor's beard. Now, I shaved my beard for that reason, so there can be peace and harmony in the church. But, they fought over that. They fought over what to do with the playground out back. I was kind of encouraged by this because we're renting the property. So, we're pretty good on that.

They were fighting over whether to install dividers in the women's restroom. They were fighting over who has access to the copy machine and could buy stamps for the church office. They fought over whether to put cranberry juice in the communion cups or grape juice. And whether to serve gluten-free communion bread. And we laugh, but that's true, right? I mean Christians fight over things like that. We split churches over that.

I knew a church in Illinois that had 15 members and seven different bank accounts, because they couldn't agree on what to do with the money. So, they split it up into seven different accounts and gave one account to each family. And I might add to this, and I think you know this, but it needs to be said, that that fighting brings disgrace to the name of Christ. I mean Jesus was a Prince of Peace, and when His followers fight like dogs, it brings disgrace to Him. He's the Lamb of God, and when His people attack each other like wolves, that's a disgrace.

In fact, Jesus says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." Which means that those people who destroy the church and kill it with their fighting are thieves. We can say it this way (just so you see how important this is to God), did you know that the first thing that was talked about at Jesus' birth was peace, and one of the last things He talked about before He died was peace? It was the bookends of His life. At His birth, the angel sang "peace on earth to men", right? And before He died, Jesus said, "My peace, I leave to you."

If you think about it, Jesus didn't leave us money and possessions. He didn't leave us success and worldly power. He left His peace. When He rose from the grave, He appeared to the disciples and said, "Peace unto you." But this kind of discussion went on and on and on in the Scriptures. As a matter of fact, just about every book in the New Testament makes a reference to peace.

Just a couple of examples of this. First Corinthians 7:15 says, "God has called us to peace." If you want to know what is your calling as a Christian, your calling is to make peace with others. That's your job description, that's what we do. Galatians 5:22 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, and joy and peace." Colossians 3:15 says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." First Thessalonians 5:13 says, "Live in peace." But the point is peace is a big deal to God. You read about it continually in Scripture. And you can't go very far in the Bible without bumping into something that talks about peace.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning: how to make peace in the church, how to get along with other Christians. Just a couple quotes on this, Hudson Taylor said, "The Lord is my Shepherd on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and all throughout the week. And He is my Shepherd in January, February, and all throughout the year. Which means that I can have peace with God and my fellow man." Thomas Watson said, "If God be our God, then He will give us peace in trouble. And when there is a storm without, He will make peace within, and He will make it within His church."

Which brings us to the book of Romans. Because in Romans chapter 14, Paul tells us how to have peace in the church. He tells us how to get along with other Christians. As a matter of fact, this was so important to Paul that this is how he closes out the book of Romans. He ends on this note. Chapters 15 and 16 are just kind of personal greetings, "Say 'hello' to this person for me, say 'hello' to that one." But chapter 14 is actually the end of the book.

And just to build up to this, if you want to go through the book real quickly with me, in Romans one through chapter three Paul says that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but are justified freely by His grace." (That's Romans one through three). Which means that we can have peace with God through grace. We can come to Him through a free gift.

Chapters four through five say that we can have this through faith. As a matter of fact, Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God." You actually see that phrase there. Our faith in Christ gives us peace. Chapters six through eight say that it gives us victory over sin. Chapters nine through 11 tie this into the nation of Israel.

And then if you would look at Chapter 12:1 with me, just to kind of get the flow of the book here. In Chapter 12:1, Paul starts with the word "therefore", tying it back into all he has said so far. In other words, this is the application of all this. This is the "therefore" in chapter 12:1. He says, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

Paul says that as a result of all these things in Romans one through 11, you need to present your bodies a spiritual service of worship, a living and holy sacrifice. Which means that you present your bodies to God over and over and over again. We're going to talk about worship next week. You worship God over and over and over again.

I told you last time that a living sacrifice doesn't come off the altar. It stays up there. It doesn't say, "Stop it, I don't want to do this," when things get hard. It keeps burning. And Paul says, "In light of all Christ has done for you, and in light of all God has done for you, you need to keep burning for God." And he says, "This is how you do that."

In chapters 12 and 13, he says, "You need to practice your spiritual gifts and love one another." That's in Romans 12. Chapter 13 says, "We should submit to the governing authorities. And do this knowing that the time is near." And then in chapter 14, Paul says, "We need to make peace."

This is how you offer your body a living and holy sacrifice to God. You make peace with others. You work hard to get along with them. God has given everything to get along with you. He's

given His son. He has sacrificed and killed Him on the cross so that you may be forgiven, and now you need to go and forgive others. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning. How do we make peace in the church? This is how you do that. How do we stop all the fighting and arguing? Paul tells us in Romans 14.

So, if you're taking notes, let me just give you the outline. Here are five tips for making peace in the church. Five tips for making peace in the church, for stopping the fighting. These are things that apply to each one of us individually. These are things that apply to us corporately as a body. The first one is this: we need to accept the one who is weaker. If you want to stop the fighting, you need to accept the one who is weaker. Weaker in the faith is the idea here. Weaker in all the things we've talked about in the book of Romans.

You need to accept the one who doesn't get all of this stuff in Romans one through 13. If they get it, but not completely. If you look in (or they get it, but maybe in a weak way)...if you look in chapter 14:1, Paul says this. He actually says that phrase. "Now accept the one who is weak in faith."

I want to stop here and make a few comments on this. Because this really sums up what Paul is saying in the whole chapter. The whole chapter is contained in these nine little words. But let me walk you through this. The word "weak" here means "sick or feeble". It's someone who is malnourished or unhealthy. And the word "faith" means "the faith". Actually, you don't have this in the English translation, but in the Greek, you see the definite article there, which means this is the Christian faith Paul is referring to. This is someone who is weak or sick in the gospel. They're sick in their salvation. They are alive spiritually speaking. They are saved, but they're malnourished in that. They're weak.

Paul later will call them a "brother". And he'll say that Christ died for them. So, these are Christians we're talking about. But they're weak, and Paul says you're supposed to accept them. That word in Greek is the word *proslambanó* which means "to accept him to yourself or draw him in". Some of your translation say, "receive him," and that's a good word for this. You receive him, instead of rejecting him. You draw him in, instead of pushing him away.

And I'll talk about the rest of this verse here in just a moment, but I think our churches would look very different if Christians started doing this, amen? Our congregations would feel different. I think the atmosphere would change. You guys have heard about the church that couldn't agree over the colour of the carpet, so they split over it. You guys all heard about that?

I come from a place where boy, that happened all the time. And they said that those who are really mature want green carpet because green is the colour of godliness. (We all know that). And so, they rejected all the people who wanted brown carpet. And so those people went across town and started another church with brown carpet. Paul says don't do that in the church. He says don't do that to your brother.

I mean if you think about what he's saying here, he's saying, "Look, the guy is weak anyway. He is sick and malnourished in the gospel. So, don't fight with him over things like that." We can say it this way (and this may come as a shock to you - it's a convicting chapter for me to think

through), if you're fighting with someone over that, the colour of the carpet or something silly, you know what that means? You know what Paul is saying here? He's saying you are the weaker brother. Or you're behaving like the weaker brother.

See, the weaker brother fights over the carpet. The weaker brother gets caught up with the playground out back and length of the pastor's beard. The weaker brother gets into the whole, "Do we have to have cranberry juice or grape juice?" It's the stronger brother that draws people in. It's the stronger brother that receives them. He makes peace, instead of pushing people away.

You know, we normally think that the angrier, the godlier, right? Or the madder, the better. Because that shows that you're passionate. Paul says not necessarily so. You can be all worked up for the wrong reasons.

You know, one of the best examples I ever heard about this came from a pastor in England named Robert Chapman. He pastored in the 1800s in a small town full of angry people. The town was notorious for getting into fights. And when he first came there, the church split over something that was so minor I don't think we even know what it was. And when the people left, they demanded that they keep the building. Now, I don't know if you know how church splits work, but you don't leave and demand the building. And they did that. And Chapman gave it to them. By law, it was his property. By law, it was his congregation's building. And he gave it to them to make peace and stop a war.

Now, whether you think that's right or not, it's not really the point. The point is what he said afterwards. He said this, this was his reason for doing that. He said, "My job is to love others and not to seek that they love me." He said, "My job is to make peace." Friends, let me ask you, is that your job this morning? Is it your job in the Christian life to make peace? Do you see that as your main priority as a Christian to love others and not to seek that they love you, to draw them in, instead of pushing them away?

Let's get personal for a moment. It's a personal passage. I've been in my kitchen all week, let me get in your kitchen for a minute. Is it okay for people to disagree with you? That's an application I took out of this. Is it okay for someone to have a different opinion about the colour of the carpet or the playground? Or do you have to have your way all the time?

I heard one commentator describing Paul's personality this way. Paul would have been someone who would have fought with everybody about everything, right? You read Paul's letters, can you imagine ever talking to Paul in a coffee shop and saying, "Paul, what do you think about this?" and Paul saying, "Mm-hmm, I've never thought about that before."? He would never say that. He had the most contentious personality in the Bible, and here he is writing about accepting someone who is weaker.

I had a professor in seminary who said to us, "You know, don't get upset with people who don't have the same theology as you do. Be patient with them. Give them time, because how long did it take you to come to those conclusions?" That's what Paul is saying here. Give the weaker brother time, be patient with him. Accept him if he is in Christ. (I'll say a word about this in a

moment). That doesn't mean you don't confront wrong ideas. And that doesn't mean you don't teach the guy. There's a place for that. But you do it with an attitude of love and acceptance.

And that leads to the next tip for making peace in the church. And this goes right along with that: don't judge the weaker brother. Accept him and don't judge him. Don't look down on him, is the idea here. Don't say, "I'm up here and you're down here. You know, I'm this far along in Christ and you're only that far along." Paul says, "Don't have that mindset." If you read verse one, he says, "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions."

And Paul gives us the motive here, or the purpose, of accepting your brother, kind of from a negative angle. And he says, "It's not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions." Some of your translations say you shouldn't do it to quarrel with him, pick a fight. It's a hard phrase to translate into English, but the idea is that you shouldn't make this a point of contention; his different opinions and his weaknesses. Again, you can correct him, but gently without judgement.

He goes on to say in verse two, he says,

2 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. 3 The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Now, to get what Paul was saying there, in the first century Christians were coming out of the Jewish world and some of them were coming out of the pagan world, which made a big deal about food. I mean both the Jewish system in the Old Testament and even the pagan religions, made a big deal about what you could and couldn't eat.

The Old Testament you know, you couldn't eat pork or animals, what is it, with a cloven hoof? That kind of thing. It would break my heart to not eat pork. That would be a hard life. But they came out of that world. And Paul says in verse five, "One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike."

So, they also had holy days, like Pentecost and the Day of Atonement, that they got caught up in. Some of them said that carries over into the church today, or they wrestled with that. And Paul says, "Whatever your position on that, don't look down on your brother for that." Because, verse three says, "God has accepted him." And the idea is, if God has accepted him, you should too, right? How can you reject what Christ has accepted? I mean how can we judge what God has forgiven? If he is in Christ, if he believes the gospel, he is a brother and he is to be treated as a brother.

And I just mentioned how different our churches would be if we accepted each other. But I mean how different would they be if we stopped judging each other, right? Like this. I don't mean judging ideas. You have to judge ideas. I mean judging people. If churches stop saying, "You

can't come in here because you're different. Or because you have a strange view on food or days of the week." It would look very different.

Now, again this isn't to say some ideas shouldn't be confronted. Paul confronted ideas continually. And this doesn't mean everyone should teach or lead in the church. A weaker brother should not do that. He should have a good handle on the faith before he teaches. But it means that people should be able to come into the church without judgment.

You know, I had a friend of mine, serves at a large church in California in the children's ministry. And he says they have 200 babies a week. 200 infants. That's a lot of crying from the workers (maybe a little bit from the kids too). But he says, "You know, a lot of people..." (he's been doing this for ten years). He says, "a lot of people come into the ministry and they want to criticize everything." He says, "You know, I'm there every Sunday. I've been there for ten years and I see people come and go. And they come in and they want to fix this or fix that, or they want to change this or change that. And they say 'This is wrong and that's wrong.'" He said, "But it's a church. And something is always wrong in a church. Something always needs fixing in a church. And if you're not okay with that, you're not going to like being here."

Friends, there's always something broken in a church. And you can't come in like a bull in a china shop and smash everything. You can't come in and say, "You're wrong, and you're wrong, and you're wrong." We're all wrong somewhere. And maybe they are wrong in those areas. But you don't have the attitude of looking down on them. God doesn't treat you that way. You know, if you think about it, God should smash all of us, amen? I mean God should break all of us. And so, don't judge the weaker brother.

You know, it's been said if you ever find the perfect church, don't join it, because then you're going to mess it all up, right? Because we're all imperfect.

And it leads to another tip for making peace in the church. And that is this: remember who you're accountable to. Accept the weaker brother, don't judge the weaker brother, and remember who you're accountable to. After telling us not to judge, Paul goes one step farther and he says, "Remember Who the real Judge is. Remember Who sits on the throne. Remember Who rules the church." And he says in verse ten, he says it this way. He says,

10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.' 12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

And this is so important to Paul that if you notice in those three verses, he repeats the same idea from a couple of different angles. Verse ten says, "For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." Then he quotes Isaiah 45 to say, "We'll all bow before that judgment seat." And then he says, "You will all give an account of yourself to God. You'll stand before the throne, you'll bow before it, and you will give an account of yourself there." All of us. He uses the word "all of us" there.



And just to show you what he means, the judgment seat here in verse ten, is not the judgment seat of the lost. This is the judgment seat of the saved. Theologians call it (if you want to write this name down) the Bema Seat. B-E-M-A, the Bema Seat. It's the Greek word for judgment seat. Here is one word: *bema*. And it refers to the time when Christians will stand before God and give an account of their lives before going into heaven. Christians will not be judged in hell, Christians will not be punished eternally that way. But we will stand before God and give an account. And Paul says, "In light of that day, be careful how you treat people, right?" In light of that day, verse ten says, "Don't regard your brother with contempt."

The word "contempt" there is a strong word in Greek meaning to "despise something, to loathe it". It's amazing how many Christians loathe each other. They see each other at the grocery store, they don't talk. They see each other at the hockey game, they don't visit. As a matter of fact, if they were out on the ice, they'd probably start punching each other, right?

You know, Canadians are such friendly sweet people, but why do you guys like hockey so much? That's the most violent ... it doesn't match with the ... I'm trying to understand the culture here. I explain this to people back home, and they say, "Well, they always fight." I say, "No, they don't, they're nice people." "Don't be like that," Paul says, for we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

You know, Francis Schaffer was a Christian author who used to live in the mountains of Switzerland. He lived among the Alps, in a place of mountains and deep ravines. And he said, "Christians often put their mountains in the wrong place." He said, "They often put a ravine between themselves and other Christians, when the ravine or the mountain is actually between themselves and the world." The mountain is between us and the lost. Christians are on the same side. We play for the same team. We're all saved by grace, we're all saved through faith, we're all going to give an account, we're not enemies.

But let me ask you friends, do you treat other Christians like enemies? Do you put a mountain between yourself and them? Do you believe we're on the same side? Let me say it this way and get real personal again, because again, I've been personal in my own life this whole week in this chapter. Are there people in this church or another church, that you're not speaking to over something petty, like the colour of the carpet? Or putting cranberry juice in the communion cups?

You know, Jesus said if you're presenting your offering at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Which means, you shouldn't come to church if you treat people with contempt. You shouldn't come without being reconciled to your brother. Don't build mountains between yourself and everybody else. God will hold you accountable for that. You'll have to answer for that.

I just mentioned Robert Chapman to you a moment ago but let me do it again. Because he was talking to a friend one time, who got into an argument with someone else and wouldn't speak to them. We've all been there. We threw up a mountain or a ravine. And so, Robert Chapman asked him, he said, "Well, how long did you try to reconcile?" The man said, "Three months." Robert

Chapman said, "You should have taken three years." Friends, are we trying that hard to reconcile? Are we taking three years or four years or ten years if necessary? Are we tearing down the mountains this morning?

And it leads to a fourth tip for making peace in the church. And that is this: don't put a stumbling block in someone's way. Which goes right along with the idea of the mountain. Don't put a stumbling block in someone's way. Don't make it hard for them to follow Christ. If they're going to get upset with Biblical doctrine, let them get upset with Biblical doctrine but not with you, right? Christian life is hard enough, don't make it harder. The road to heaven is narrow enough, don't make it narrower with your personal preferences.

And Paul says in verse 13, he says, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this - not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way." And I looked it up, and those words "obstacle" and "stumbling block" are two different words in Greek, but they mean the same thing. "Something to trip over. Something to bar your path."

If you remember earlier in Romans nine, Paul says Jesus was a "stumbling block" or "a rock of offense" to the Jews because they tripped over Him, they fell over Him. They refused to believe in Him and got smashed. And Paul says that's okay. He says, "Jesus is the way to heaven, if you don't believe in Him, so be it. But don't you be a stumbling block now," Paul says. "Don't let people trip over you."

He says in verse 15 of Romans. 14, going along in the passage, verse 15, "For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died."

I just mentioned that Christians in the early church were having a hard time with food, and Paul says, "Don't destroy someone over that." If it's a big deal to somebody, be sensitive to that. You know, if you invite them over to your home and you know they don't want to eat a pork sandwich, don't serve a pork sandwich. If you go over to their home and all they eat is vegetables, be content with that.

And I don't have time to go into all of this, but just to give an example, you know last week I mentioned the holiday of Lent, because we just had the holiday of Lent. Some people really get into that, don't they? It's very important to some people. Some people really get into holidays like Christmas and Easter. It reminds them of Jesus, it's very meaningful to them, and that's okay. Some Christians don't. Some of you, you know you get to December 25<sup>th</sup>, "Oh it's Christmas, I got to go buy some presents at the Dollar General Store." But whatever your stance on that, don't look down on another believer for that. Don't be a stumbling block. Don't say, "Well, if you're really godly, you would have my position on this."

And we could look at the issue of food. Some Christians are very particular about what they eat. Food is very important to them. Some of you eat at Tim Hortons every day. You don't even know what cholesterol is. You think it's the latest doughnut at Tim Horton's. "There's a cholesterol donut? Can I get a dozen of those?" Whatever your thoughts on that, don't be a stumbling block to someone. Don't let people fall on your opinions. The Bible is very clear about

a lot of things, but it gives us freedom in a lot of things. And where there is freedom, let there be freedom, amen? Let it be okay. If the Scripture is silent, let us be silent and love our brother.

And that leads to one more tip for making peace. And this one kind of sums up the rest. Paul says, “You want to accept the weaker brother and not judge them. You want to remember who you're accountable to and not put a stumbling block in someone's way.” That leads to one more tip for making peace in the church. And this is what it all boils down to: don't tear down the work of God. This is how Paul finishes the book of Romans. Romans 1:16 says, “For I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” And now Paul rounds off the book by saying, “Don't tear down the power of God. Don't destroy His work. God built this thing, and you don't want to mess with that. And he says in verse 20, it's a phrase he uses. He says, “Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food.”

By the way, just one small comment. I just want to throw this in here because I didn't have a chance to say this a moment ago. If you look in verse 19, just above 20. Paul says, “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” Paul says, “Don't pursue the issue of days and food and all this other stuff, pursue peace and the things that build each other up.” And then he says in verse 20, “Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food.”

The word “tear down” there is *kathaireó* in Greek. It means “to throw something down and unravel it”. Don't unravel the church over this stuff. You guys know this, peace is a very fragile thing, isn't it? Paul says, “Don't go around picking at things and unraveling that piece.” Food is fine. Verse 20 goes on to say, “All things indeed are clean.” Food is clean. But it says, “It's evil if it gives an offense.” “Unnecessarily” is the idea there. Holidays are clean, days are clean. Colour of the carpet is clean. But it's evil, it's wrong if it tears someone down.

And this is the end of the book of Romans, essentially. I mean Paul says a few concluding comments in chapter 15, and the rest is kind of sort of his goodbyes. His best wishes to the people that he's writing to. Because I was thinking about this, I think Paul did this because he really understood the church. I mean he really understood what we struggled with. I mean Paul was a church planter. He worked with churches all the time. We get so distracted by things that don't matter. We get so caught up in things that have no bearing on eternity, and it ruins our peace.

A church in the US was once on the verge of closing because it was fighting over the food and the colour of the carpet and all that. So, the pastor decided to do something unusual. He decided to hold a funeral service for the church. And he asked everyone to come in on a Sunday morning, and as they filed in, they saw a big casket at the front, a big black casket; with the church logo on it (that's kind of interesting). And inside the casket was a note that said, “Herein lies the person responsible for my death.” And beside the note was a mirror.

And the point the pastor was making is that everyone was responsible for my death. Everyone killed the church. They didn't accept one another. They judged one another, they put stumbling blocks in each other's way, and eventually they tore down the work of God. Let's be sure not to do that this morning. Let's keep the main thing the main thing at Grace Fellowship.

As we celebrate Vision Sunday and have a good time with Soup Sunday and our annual general meeting, all these good things, let's remember who built this church, amen? Let's remember the power of God that established this. You didn't do it, I didn't do it. The Lord did that. Let's remember that and make peace. Let's pray.

Father we do ask, Lord, for Your grace and mercy, as we think about peace in Your church. Lord, I thank You for these dear people this morning who do love Your church, and they do love Your peace, and they work hard for it. I just pray that our time today would just be to excel still more. This is not in any way meant to be a rebuke. Lord, I thank you for our people who love You and love peace.

Lord, we do pray for Your help though in growing in these areas. This is something that we're all convicted of this morning, from the pulpit down to the pew. Lord, help us to work hard at doing what You've already done in our souls. You have made us right with Yourself. You have given us peace with You. Now Lord, may we go and apply that peace into the lives of others that we come in contact with.

Father, may You be glorified as we take the Lord's Supper. We do that to remember our peace as well. We pray this all in Christ's name, amen.