

Good morning and thank you so much for joining us. We are continuing onward in the incredible book of Romans, so would you please turn in your bibles to Romans 14? After today we'll only have 2 chapters left, and then we'll go back to the OT, and begin our study in the book of Ruth as we continue to go verse by verse through the entire Bible.

If you remember, we saw how chapter 13 was really all about loving others. And chapter 14 shows us the ways we're to love our Christian brothers and sisters, through the practical application of showering each other with grace.

Romans 14 shows us that we must give latitude, and freedom to others when dealing with non-sin issues. And to make sure we don't miss the forest through the trees, we're going to read verses 1-10 then we'll dive in

1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. 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.

5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord;[fn] 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. 7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. 8 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. 9 For to this end Christ died and rose[fn] and lived again, that He might be

Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 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.

The title of this morning's message is WHAT LOVE LOOKS LIKE

Let's pray

Montgomery AL story?

I don't doubt they love Israel. I don't doubt they love Jesus!

But do they really love me, and others?

1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. Clearly there is a difference in Christians, because Paul shows 2 categories here. Those who are weak in the faith, and those who aren't weak.

There are many reasons why a Christian might be weak in the faith.

SHOW PIC Perhaps they are new believer in Christ, and just like a baby, they are weak. They're a new believer, not sure yet of their doctrinal footing. **CLOSE PIC**

or

Just a like a body, a Christian might be weak because they're sick or diseased by legalism. I've had people express an interest in coming to a CCC service, until they learned there was no dress code. **SHOW PIC** They shuddered in horror at the thought of flip flops, jeans and Hawaiian shirts. **CLOSE PIC**

or

A Christian might be weak in the faith because they just haven't been given good food by solid teaching. **SHOW PIC** In the last month I heard 4 different churches in Cincinnati advertising on the

radio how they are doing the exact same summer series on Hollywood and the bible. **CLOSE PIC** Sadly the sheep in the pews are going hungry when pastors just cut and paste!

Finally, a Christian might be weak if they don't exercise-they don't apply their faith. **SHOW PIC** As you know the Dead sea is dead because the intake is good, water flows from the Jordan into the Dead sea, but there's no outlet. The water that was once flowing and alive becomes dead, and useless. **CLOSE PIC** And the same can happen to Christians who don't exercise their faith! Their relationship with Jesus becomes mundane and robotic, making them weak in the faith.

We're all at different points in our walk with Christ, and verse 1 commands us to receive each other.

2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. If you're a vegetarian, please know the Bible never says 'the great supper of the cabbage'

Of course I'm joking!!

Being a vegetarian is a personal choice, a conviction for which you're to be convinced of in your own mind!

And we now learn that there was some conflict in the church because of some Jewish Christians who refrained from certain foods.

Hey even Peter, redeemed and restored by grace, fell back into legalistic old habits by trying to keep a list of kosher foods. That is until Paul confronted him **Galatians 2:11 Now when Peter[fn] had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.**

Verse 2 addresses a serious issue the Christians we're struggling with. See in those days, in Rome, it wasn't uncommon for meat to come from pagan temples where idolaters made their sacrifices, then sold the extra cuts of meat to turn a profit.

And this provided a moral dilemma to some believers.

Stronger believers weren't bothered by this, the meat was just meat. Their standing with God was based on the faith they put in Christ, not the food they put on their plate.

But the weaker believers - those who trusted in the dos and don'ts - were appalled at the thought of eating desecrated meat. To them this was guilt-by-association. To these vegetarians - the ground round was out of bounds.

Obviously, most of us have never agonized over the spiritual implications of what we purchase from the meat section at Aldi's or Kroger.

This may seem like an irrelevant issue, but how we handle nonessentials in church life is critically important. Usually, Christians divide and fellowships fracture not over the major doctrinal issues, rather Christians and fellowships split over minor concerns.

We tend to agree on the essentials, but it's the nonessentials that cause us to polarize. And if we're not careful, our judgmental attitudes can spoil the sweetness of unity and fellowship.

As Paul puts it in verse 1, we tend to get distracted in "disputes over doubtful things."

A sensitive conscience is a good thing, but it can sometimes lead a person to restrict his or her freedom in Christ unnecessarily.

Now we know that God has not forbidden Christians from eating any food **1 Timothy 4:4 For every creature of God is good, and**

nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; 5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

What we eat doesn't in itself affect our relationship with God.

Jesus said in **Matthew 15 11 Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.**"

3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. It would be easy for a Christian who felt free to eat meat to despise others as hopeless legalists. It would also be easy for those who did not eat meat to judge those who did as Christian liberals who were displeasing to God. But God has received those Christians who eat meat.

And this is a reminder for all of us that Christianity isn't a pledge to a principle or precedent. Christianity is a pledge of allegiance to Jesus.

As followers of Jesus, we are each bound to one desire, to one passion, one mission, and that's following our Lord.

God has granted every believer liberty in following Him. And because of this liberty, it can be easy to criticize those who don't operate the way we do.

In the upper room, before the cross, do you remember Jesus' prayer?

John 17 20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will[fn] believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know

that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Jesus prayed His followers would be one just as He and the Father are one.

The Godhead is a blend of unity and diversity. God is one God, but three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three are equal, but very different.

Our oneness as believers should also be a combination of unity and diversity.

Oneness doesn't eliminate our uniqueness and distinctiveness. A group of people can have unity and still enjoy their diversity.

In fact, spiritual oneness is not the denial of our differences, but the realization that our one commonality is greater than all our differences. When you and I are obsessed with Jesus, it causes all of our differences to take a backseat.

Verse 4 the tone gets more serious....

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. When it comes to nonessentials of the faith, we answer to Jesus, not to each other.

5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. It wasn't just diet, but days that caused some chaffing between the believers in the Roman church. Were they to worship God on Saturday or on Sunday?

And the scripture this morning is clear- when it comes to areas where's it's not black or white in the Bible – in other words it's a gray area, it boils down to personal preference. As v5 says, "Let each be fully convinced in his own mind."

Here's a list of gray area's that Christians debate and divide over in modern times:

Can a Christian enjoy a glass of wine at dinner, or drink a beer after mowing the lawn, or chew tobacco, or smoke a cigar?...

What type of swimsuits should Godly women wear? Can a man grow long hair - or sport an ear-ring and still be pleasing to God?...

SHOW PIC And what about tattoos?... **CLOSE PIC**

Gray matters also appear in family life...

How should a Christian educate their kids - home school? or Christian school? or public school?...

Is it right to put your elderly parents in a nursing home, or does God want you to bring them home with you to live out their days?...

And what about church services? Worship styles and church etiquette are also subject to personal preference - more gray matters!

Is it more pleasing to God to play an electric guitar on a Sunday morning or should we only be singing hymns?...

Can a person wear shorts to church?...

The list can go on and on-you get the point!

These are all gray matters, yet to most people gray matters really matter!

But according to Romans 14, rather than me telling you what to do, or you telling me what to do, it's up to each of us to report directly to Jesus.

Of course if an issue is squarely addressed in Scripture our position is clear - stick to the Word. Black-and-white is easy. But with gray area's we need to leave each other room to operate - even room to disagree.

We must never forget the 12 apostles whom Jesus selected. 2 stand out- Simon the zealot and Matthew the tax collector-you couldn't pick 2 guys who were more different!!

Matthew, the Roman-collaborating tax collector who was viewed as a traitor. And Simon the zealot, which identifies Simon as a member of the radical Zealot party looking to overthrow Rome.

Imagine the fundamental disagreements those 2 had!

I believe Jesus chose those 2 for the purpose of demonstrating that folks who are on polar opposites of the spectrum can still be united in Christ!

Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Folks the mark of a mature Christian is the ability, despite our differences, to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord;[fn] and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.

Pause here: Some Christians believe that we should behave differently on Sunday, or during Lent, or on some other "religious" day. And if you'd like to do that-that's fine! It's between you and the Lord.

...6 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. One person is grateful to God for the burger they eat. Another person thinks that by abstaining from meat they're bringing glory to God. What matters in both cases is that God gets glorified!

7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. 8 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. From beginning to end, our lives are to be dedicated to God. Therefore, whatever we do, we're to do it for Jesus, because Jesus is Lord.

Colossians 3 23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for[fn] you serve the Lord Christ

9 For to this end Christ died and rose[fn] and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Only Jesus paid the price to be Lord of His Church.

Whenever you and I begin to judge another Christian in a gray area it means we're actually usurping the Lord's authority. Without realizing it, we can be trying to take Jesus' place. I don't know about you, but that sends shivers up my spine because I'm so quick to judge!

10 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.[fn] The strict Christian found it easy to judge his brother, writing him off as an unspiritual meat-eatin' compromiser.

The free Christian found it easy to show contempt against his brother, thinking of him as an uptight-legalistic-salvation by works believer.

But the Bible rebukes both attitudes. We need to stop worrying about other folks because we will have enough to answer for before the throne of Jesus.

The judgment seat that's mentioned here is the bema seat, equivalent to the judge's seat in the Olympic Games. After each game, the winners came before the judge's seat to receive crowns for first, second, and third places.

Likewise, the Bible tells us that every Christian's works will be tested by fire, and we'll be rewarded for those which remain... **1 Corinthians 3:13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**

The judgment seat of Christ is only concerned with a Christian's rewards and position in the kingdom, not with our salvation.

11 For it is written:

"As I live, says the LORD,

Every knee shall bow to Me,

And every tongue shall confess to God."^[fn] **12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.** This quote from Isaiah 45 emphasizes the fact that all of us will have to appear before God in humility, and give account before God. And knowing this, we should let God deal with our Christian brothers and sisters in these non-essential issues.

It's good to remember the old motto, "In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity."

13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus helped us to understand what judging one another means. It means judging others according to a standard that we would not want to have applied to ourselves.

To be clear this does not take away the need and the responsibility for admonishment or rebuke. When we admonish or rebuke, we're to do it over clear Scriptural principles, not over doubtful things. Certainly we may offer advice to others about doubtful things, but we should never judge them.

Now verse 13 also mentions a stumbling block.

When a toddler is going to be walking around the house, what do you do-you make sure everything's picked up so they don't fall and smash their face! This is warning us not to participate in an activity that will stumble-to tempt or mislead a brother or sister in Christ. And this is what the next several verses addresses...

14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Again it's a matter of personal convictions and conscience.

I was asked a few times about showing the Bengals in the SB here at church on the screens. And that sounds cool. But honestly, I recoil at the thought of watching sports in church. There's nothing sinful about it, to me it just feels wrong. To you it may seem like a wonderful idea for fellowship, but to me I can't bring myself to do it.

SHOW PIC Every year downtown cincy has Bockfest. And it got me to thinking. What if some meat was set on the alter and

dedicated, and then offered to me. You may feel fine eating it, but honestly I would struggle! **CLOSE PIC**

Again it's a matter of personal convictions...

15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Our liberty in how we deal with a non-essential issue becomes sinful when our liberty causes harm to a fellow believer.

Hey our liberty can sabotage someone's faith! Exercising our freedom in Christ is never worth damaging someone else!

If our behavior regarding these non-essential things is creating spiritual problems for another Christian, then our conduct is not loving **Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;**

The welfare of a Christian brother or sister should obviously take precedence over our liberty. **1 Corinthians 8:13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.**

We need to make sure we're not using our freedom in Christ in a way that harms someone the Lord died to save.

16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The Romans were upset and bickering over diet and days, but both issues are of little consequence in the big scheme of things.

What matters in the Kingdom of God are matters of the heart - right living, peaceful relationships, and a joy that springs forth from the HS

When we place non-essentials before righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, then we are out of touch not only with God's priorities, but we're out of touch with His heart.

18-19

18 For he who serves Christ in these things^[fn] is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Loving one another is always more important than enjoying our freedom in Christ or proving a point. God's mission in the world is to use us to save souls and to grow faith, not to win arguments and create converts who agree with our thinking.

20-21

20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

Use the example of Bockfest-you may have no problem in that example eating the food. But you can't come to me and start pressuring me and saying mmm this is so good-why are you so uptight Brian, just have some. See then I'm going to be on tailspin questioning my faith and at least for several hours I'm gonna be on the struggle bus.

God isn't as concerned with our freedom as He is the unity of His believers.

This is why it's so important that our individual rights are not our guide for conduct. Love is to be the guide of our conduct.

See our personal rights are to be laid aside in the interest of love for one another, and that's where the rubber meets the road isn't it? Because true love demands sacrifice. It's dying to self.

22 Do you have faith?[fn] Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. If you have strong faith, and feel liberty to partake of certain things, praise God! But have your strong faith before God, not flaunting it before another Christian who will stumble.

23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.[fn] ”

When the weak Christian violates their conscience, then it's a sin.

People willingly alter their pace of walking while leading a small child by the hand so the child will not stumble. How much more should we be willing to alter our Christian walk for the benefit of a weaker brother or sister in Christ.

Psalm 133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is

For brethren to dwell together in unity!