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Romans Road to Recovery / Romans 14:1–12

Because Jesus Christ holds sole jurisdiction over the believer at His future judgment seat, we must refuse the legalistic urge to condemn others over non-doctrinal, personal matters of conscience.

Notes

Section: Faith to Faith (Changing Faith) — Section Three: Living at Peace in the Body

7/26/2026 — Romans 14:1-12

Title: "The Sovereign of the Conscience"

Subtitle: Curbing the Legalistic Impulse to Regulate Christian Liberty

Main Idea: Because Jesus Christ holds sole jurisdiction over the believer at His future judgment seat, we must refuse the legalistic urge to condemn others over non-doctrinal, personal matters of conscience.

Companion Scripture: Colossians 2:16-23

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Introduction:

In the mid-1600s, the Puritans in England and the American colonies became deeply convicted that because Christmas was not explicitly commanded in Scripture, it shouldn't be celebrated. They viewed the holiday as a corruption of the faith. But they didn't just hold this as a personal conviction—they turned it into a law. In 1644, they actually banned the eating of mince pies and plum pudding on December 25th and commanded that all shops must remain open. Meanwhile, other faithful believers were deeply grieved, believing they should set the day apart to joyfully celebrate the incarnation of Christ. Christians were literally condemning each other over whether it was a sin to eat a pie or take a day off in December.

We can look back at that and shake our heads, but that temptation is one we all share. We have a subtle, fleshly urge to act as the Holy Spirit in someone else's life. We find the Ten Commandments hard enough to keep, but we constantly want to write an eleventh or twelfth for our brothers and sisters. We love it when people look like us, vote like us, educate their kids like us, and spend their money like us.

When others don't look or act like us, Our default setting is either to look down

on them or to condemn them.

The tension in the Roman Church wasn't theoretical, and it wasn't over mince pies; but it was over a dinner menu.

As New Testament scholars like F.F. Bruce and Douglas Moo demonstrate, the historical backdrop here is the Edict of Claudius in A.D. 49. Like we have mentioned over the last few weeks, it is important to keep in mind that the Jewish believers were exiled from Rome, and the Gentiles enjoyed five years of freedom from Jewish dietary laws. When Claudius died and the Jewish believers returned in A.D. 54, they expected kosher tables, but instead they found none. Instead, they were instantly a church on the brink of fracturing.

Before we dive deeper into this, we must draw a hard line between Romans 13 and Romans 14.

Last week in Romans 13, Paul told us to put off the works of darkness. The Works of darkness were moral absolutes like drunkenness and sexual immorality.

But as theologians like John Stott and R.C. Sproul rigorously point out, in Chapter 14 Paul is dealing strictly with *adiaphora*—literally "matters indifferent." These are areas of conscience where the Bible doesn't give a direct command.

We must absolutely keep in mind that Romans 14 does not in any way excuse sin, nor can it be used to do so.

When we *are* dealing with genuine matters of personal conscience—those areas where faithful Christians simply disagree—how do we keep from tearing each other apart?

Paul's answer is to pull our eyes off each other and fix them on the only true Judge who sits on the throne.

(Main Idea):

Because Jesus Christ holds sole jurisdiction over the believer at His future judgment seat, we must refuse the legalistic urge to condemn others over non-doctrinal, personal matters of conscience.

We must refuse the legalistic urge to condemn others over non-doctrinal, personal matters of conscience.

The very first thing Paul tells the Roman church to do is to disarm. If Christ is the only judge, we have to resign from the supreme court of each other's lives...

I. Drop Our Gavels and Embrace All the Household of Faith (Romans 14:1-4)

- It is one thing to simply stop judging someone from a distance, but it is another thing entirely to bring them close.
- There are 4 distinct things we can do to drop our gavels—our judgement— and pick up something else in its place

First we must...

1. Embrace the Brother or Sister Who Sees Things Differently (v. 1)

Romans 14:1 *"1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions."*

- Focus on the command "Welcome/Accept" (*proslambanesthe*).
 - Lexicons like BDAG and commentators like C.E.B. Cranfield emphasize Paul's use of the middle voice here.
 - It literally means to "take to oneself."
 - Paul isn't saying, "Tolerate them from across the room." He is commanding, "Draw them into your intimate fellowship."
 - In Galatians 6, Paul commands us to do good to everyone, but ***especially to the household of faith***.
 - We do not draw them in just to put their theology on trial; we draw them in because they are family.

The 2nd distinct thing we can do to drop our gavels—our judgement— and pick up something else in its place is to...

2. Stop Despising the Strict and Condemning the Free (v. 2-3)

Romans 14:2–3 *"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."*

- Paul doesn't pretend the tension doesn't exist; he puts it right on the table in verse 2. He explicitly identifies the two groups: *"One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables."* We have the Free brother and the Strict brother.
- We need to pause here for a minute. When we hear the word "weak" in v. 2, we usually think of a negative state—a flaw we need to fix.

- But Paul isn't using "weak" as an insult.
- He means they have a *tender conscience*.
- They are highly scrupulous.
- And notice what Paul *doesn't* do. He doesn't tell the strong to pull the weak into a classroom and force them to mature until they eat meat!
- He treats their tender conscience as **something sacred** that must be protected, **not a disease that must be cured**.
- We must be careful to avoid allowing the term "weak" in this passage to suggest that which demands to be fixed.
- Instead, we need to consider it as that which is sacred to that person's conscience.
- In v. 3, notice the two distinct sins at play.
 - Thomas Schreiner highlights in his commentary that Paul uses two very specific, contrasting verbs here.
 - The Strong must stop despising (*exoutheneō*)—rolling their eyes at and viewing the strict brother as a legalistic dinosaur.
 - The Weak must stop judging (*krinō*)—acting as prosecuting attorneys to condemn the free brother as a compromised pagan.

The 3rd distinct thing we can do to drop our gavels—our judgement— and pick up something else in its place is to...

3. Refuse to Trespass into Christ's Courtroom (v. 4)

Romans 14:4 "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.*"

- When you condemn a brother on a matter of conscience, you are illegally trespassing into Christ's jurisdiction.
- Note the impact of that last phrase of the verse, "*...the Lord is able to make him stand.*"

It Exposes the Root of Our Judgment: Fear and Control.

- Often, the reason we feel the need to police other believers is because we are secretly terrified that if we *don't* correct them, they will spiritually collapse. The strict brother thinks the free brother's liberty will slide into outright sin. The free brother thinks the strict brother's rules will stunt his

spiritual growth. Both sides are anxious about the other's survival.

It Relieves Us of the Burden of Playing the Holy Spirit.

- Paul is saying, "Take a deep breath and let it go. It is not your job to keep your brother standing. You don't have to play the Holy Spirit because the actual Holy Spirit is perfectly capable of keeping His children secure."

It is a Guarantee of Divine Preservation.

- The word for "able" is *dynatei* (from which we get dynamic/dynamite). It speaks of the absolute, sovereign power of God to preserve His own. We can drop our gavels because Jesus has a firm grip on those on whom we cast our watchful eyes in the Household of Faith.

The center of that which preserves us and holds us up is the Lord.

The 4th distinct thing we can do to drop our gavels—our judgement— and pick up something else in its place is to...

4. Reject the Illusion of Man-Made Religion (Colossians 2)

Colossians 2:16–23 "16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, **but are of no value** against fleshly indulgence."

- Why is judging so dangerous? Man-made rules have the "appearance of wisdom," but they are a mere "shadow" of wisdom and as such, are powerless against the flesh.
- Judging others doesn't make the church holy; it makes the church proud.

So we must first drop Our Gavels and Embrace All the Household of Faith.

The next thing Paul tells the Roman church and us to do is to...

II. Submit Our Conscience to the King (Romans 14:5-9)

Submitting our conscience to the King is not a passive exercise; it is an active, daily surrender.

Just as there are specific steps to dropping our gavels, Paul gives us three ways to submit our personal convictions to Christ's authority.

First, we must...

1. Cultivate a Fully Convinced and Renewed Mind (v. 5)

Romans 14:5 "5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind."

- Notice what Paul does here in the original language.
- In verses 3 and 4, he uses the Greek word *krinō* to command us to **stop judging** our brothers.
- But here in verse 5, when our English Bibles say one person "esteems" or "regards" one day above another, Paul uses that exact same word (*krinō*) again!
- Paul is making a brilliant play on words. He is saying, "I forbid you from judging your brother, but I command you to judge for yourself!"
- Paul doesn't say, "Nothing matters, do whatever you want." He commands intellectual rigor: "Let each be *fully convinced* in his own mind."
- You must do the hard work of judging your own convictions so you know *why* you do what you do as you look forward to the time when you stand before God.

Next we need to...

2. Orient Every Earthly Action to the Glory of the Lord (v. 6-8)

*Romans 14:6-8 "6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives **thanks to God**; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives **thanks to God**. 7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we*

are the Lord's."

- Recall the doxology of Romans 11 ("*...from Him, through Him, to Him are all things. To Him the glory forever. Amen.*").
- In the same way as that doxology, the grammar here demands that everything is done "*to the Lord*" in "*thanks to God.*"
 - The strict brother who abstains is worshiping.
 - The free brother who partakes is worshiping.
 - Both are acting out of a sacred devotion to Christ.

The method matters less than our hearts' focus on doing what we do—all we do—for the Lord, with thanks to God.

Colossians 3:17 "*17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*"

So, first we must Cultivate a Fully Convinced and Renewed Mind (v. 5)

Then we need to Orient Every Earthly Action to the Glory of the Lord (v. 6-8)

Last we need to...

3. Surrender Your Daily Preferences to the One Who is Sovereign of Life and Death (v. 9)

Romans 14:9 "*9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*"

- Not that we can prevent Him from being Lord, but that we surrender ourselves from the burden and the trap of trying ourselves to be lord and accept that there is only one true Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Only Jesus died and rose again, thereby securing or better yet confirming His right to be Lord.
- If Jesus is sovereign over the grave, He is sovereign over the calendar and the pantry of the Romans and over us.

We don't get to usurp the throne Christ bled to secure.

That throne is Christ's alone to sit on, to rule from, to judge over both us and others, according to the essence and totality of Who He is, in line with His eternal decree, to accomplish His will, for His glory alone.

So, we must Drop Our Gavels and Embrace All the Household of Faith (Romans 14:1-4)

We must Submit Our Conscience to the King (Romans 14:5-9)

The last thing Paul tells the Roman church and us to do is to...

III. Focus on What God Asks of You, Not What You Expect of Others (Romans 14:10-12)

Romans 14:10–12 *"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."*

In these verses, Paul gives the Romans and us **three** ways for us to bring what God asks into focus in our minds and lives.

1. Abandon the Absurdity of Spiritual Pride (v. 10)

- Paul asks again, "Why do you judge (*krinō*)? Why do you despise?"
- Take all the energy you spend judging your neighbor's yard and redirect it into judging the weeds in your own garden. Why? Because when you realize that you are standing in the shadow of God's judgment seat today,

Looking down on your brother is an absurd waste of your time and energy.

So Paul here is saying that doing so is absurd...a complete waste of time, since Christ alone has the right and the authority and the power to judge.

For us to strive to take on that role is futile; it is useless.

So abandon the absurdity of such spiritual Pride.

Then...

2. Bow Now Before the Supreme Magistrate (v. 10b-11)

- Just as Paul repeatedly uses the word *krinō* for our petty judgments, he suddenly drops the hammer in verse 10 with a completely different word: the *bēma* seat.

- The *bēma* was the terrifying, raised platform of the Supreme Roman Magistrate.
- Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23 and echoes his writing to the Philippians to remind us that every knee will bow to God.
- We don't wait until the end, to the last day to do this.
- God wants us not to wait, but instead to bow our knees today by dropping our gavels and letting God be the sole judge of His church.

Abandon the Absurdity of Spiritual Pride (v. 10)

Bow Now Before the Supreme Magistrate (v. 10b-11)

And finally, for the last time and for the rest of your life...

3. Direct Your Energy Toward Your Own Obedience (v. 12)

"Each of us will give an account of *himself* to God."

- The great Reformed theologian John Murray heavily emphasizes Paul's use of the Greek phrase *peri heautou* ("concerning himself") here.
- God will not hand you a clipboard to evaluate your brother's dietary habits or cultural choices; He will look at how *you* loved, lived, and obeyed your own conscience.

Your "accounting" will be the rewards for that which you did in line with your own conscience for Jesus Christ

It will not be for the punishment of what you have failed to do.

On behalf of the Holy Spirit Paul is telling us to...

Today, let the reality of our own audit drive us to personal holiness, rather than worrying about policing others.

Conclusion & Application:

So, place Your Liberties and Scruples on the Altar (Romans 12:1).

Submitting to Christ's jurisdiction means sacrificing our need to be "right" about secondary issues. It is scary to let go, but it is the only way to avoid the futility of wasted efforts and preserve the unity Christ died for.

In this passage, we need to navigate Today's Cultural Battlegrounds.

Just as contemporary expositors note, we must translate first-century "meat and days"

into our modern context.

- This plays out today in the **Education Debate** (the family convicted to strictly homeschool vs. the family convicted to be salt and light in public schools)
- The **Sabbath Debate** (the believer who stays home on Sunday vs. the believer who takes their family to a local South Jersey diner after service)
- The **Liberty Debate** (the brother who enjoys a craft beer and secular media vs. the brother who strictly abstains).

The Exhortation to the Strong is (Hide Your Pride)

If your freedom makes you roll your eyes at the brother who abstains, you are sinning. You restrict your own liberty for the sake of his soul.

Don't put his conscience on trial; you put your "rights" on the altar.

It makes sense to surrender what is not yours in the first place and a role that is actually impossible for you to fulfill by placing your "rights" on the altar and accepting your God given role to examine and manage yourself, rather than others.

The Exhortation to the Weak (Drop the Gavel)

If God has given you strict boundaries for your family that seems different from that of others, then hold to those boundaries which the Holy Spirit has given you!

Remember, the moment you require your personal convictions of everyone else in the church, you have stepped onto Christ's throne.

Stop looking over the theological fence at your brother's yard and tend to the weeds in your own garden.

Isn't that the very teachings of Jesus Christ with the "Beam" and "Splinter"?

Are you holding onto a grudge against a brother or sister over a secondary issue?

Drop your gavels today.

We can worship together, build this church together, and love one another fiercely—not because we agree on every single secondary issue, but because we have all bowed our knees to the same Sovereign Lord.