

Romans Chapter 14: (9 – 21)

- 1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.
- 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.
- 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.
- 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.
- 5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.
- 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.
- 7 For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.
- 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.
- 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.
- 10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? 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 confess to God."
- 12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.
- 13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.
- 14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.
- 15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.
- 16 So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.
- 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
- 18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.

21 It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

22 The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

We will look at what disputable matters are and we will look at another thing as how do we behave when disputable matters arise. So what are disputable matters and how to handle disagreement over disputable matters? I want to emphasize this again I did it when we were doing Romans 12, I want to say it again Romans 14 comes after Romans 1 to 11. It is very important to keep on remembering that because everything from Romans 1 to 11 was talking that we are saved by grace through faith. This is the general theme and the general message of Romans. Now in 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 he is giving us application. What does it mean? How does it look like? How are we supposed to behave? We have been saved through grace by faith, now this lifestyle looks like this if you have been saved. He is giving you an example how it looks like, how we should act. He is not giving you the means of how you need to be saved but how you are to act if you are saved. That is the big difference there. Now we are looking at how a transformed life look like in relation to weak brethren. That is what we are looking at. We will do some definitions.

First, what are disputable matters? It refers to a practice or activity that the Bible does not forbid but that some Christians are nevertheless uncomfortable with. This is not something whether judgment has not been out, it is not like “I think it is sin, the other person doesn’t think it is sin or we do not know whether it is sin or not”. Ultimately the absolute truth is ‘it is not sin’, but some people perceive it as sin. These are disputable matters. It is not whether we are disputing whether it is sin or not. It is not that we have 15 different opinions about it and you read 10 different commentaries and they give you 10 different opinions. There are hardly any issues like this when it regards to sin. It is not sin but some people feel it is sin.

When Paul uses the word “weak”, he is not saying that somebody is weak in faith or a weak Christian, Paul does not use this term in derogatory sense, he does not mean that people have weak faith in Christ instead Paul uses weak because they believers lack in the understanding and maturity to realize their freedom in Christ. They lack the maturity of understanding that they have been set free from these situations that we are going to be talking about, that they don’t have to uphold those things. For example, a lot of people who use to have Islamic faith when they come to Christ they might still feel that they cannot eat pork because they have grown with the culture, they feel that every time they eat pork they feel in their heart they are doing something against God. Does it mean that they are weak in faith? They might be very

fervent for the lord, they might have the lifestyle that speaks much louder of their love for Christ than any of us but just in this aspect they have not understood the freedom that they have in Christ to be able to eat anything.

He is talking about people who understand their freedom in Christ and then we are looking today as how the people react when they are weak in faith and how people supposed to react when they are strong in faith and how we go about this. So what are some examples that Paul gives on disputable matters. We will first look at some Biblical examples and then we will look at some contemporary examples of today and we are going to spend a great time today looking at contemporary examples.

Some Refrain From Meat And Eat Only Vegetable.

This is not the verse that tells us to be vegetarians. It is not the cause for vegetarianism, it is not a biblical justification from being a vegetarian. What if some people just felt that they couldn't eat meat because when offered up to idols. That is most probably the situation. Since that was the only food that was available they decided they will only eat the vegetables. So they felt because there was being food offered up to idols they could not eat it because it has some spiritual value to it suddenly. So he is saying that this is disputable matter. He is saying there is no food which is unclean but if somebody feels that the food is unclean then don't eat it. This is one example that he gave.

Some Honor Certain Days Above Others.

It comes from a probably Jewish background people who held the Sabbath, so they still found that they couldn't do any work on Sabbath or Sabbath should be the day to worship and they found that it that day is more important than any other day. So he is referring to those people and he is saying well this is a disputable matter. If some person thinks one day is more important than let him do worship on that day but for other people another day is important then let them do worship on that day, every day is equal then let him worship on every day. Ultimately we are supposed to worship every day, but he is saying it is a disputable matter. It does not matter which day you think is more important. Today, we know in the Middle East people do not have Sundays off, they have Fridays off. So if you would be a Christian in the Middle East you will probably go to church on Friday. Of course we have different Christian brothers and sisters who would insist that we do church on Saturday. So I would say whoever thinks whichever day is holy as long as you worship the lord that is more important.

Refrain From Drinking Wine.

Again probably wine was used to being offered up to idols as well, so some people think you shouldn't drink it. Same issue again. The Bible as you know talks a lot about wine, Jesus made water into wine. I think if Jesus would think wine would be very-very unholy he wouldn't have turned water into wine. It is not that he was oppressed by his mother and forced to do so. He wouldn't not sin just because his mom told him to. I think he was okay with wine and the other thing is that you also hear Paul talk to Timothy that it is healthy for him to drink a glass of wine. What is clearly written in the Bible is what, **don't be drunk**,

don't be intoxicated. So some people says, "I can smoke marijuana because the Bible does not talk about it", it does not say 'don't smoke weed', the Bible does not say that but again it talks about being intoxicated. You are not supposed to be intoxicated. So you can drink a glass of beer without being intoxicated but some people might not be able to drink a whole glass of beer without being intoxicated, so you have to know your own limit whether you can drink or not. So these are some examples that Paul has given us which are disputable matters. Now there are undisputable matters as well.

How we are saved, through Jesus alone, not disputable. So it is the not talking about be okay if people have different opinions on things which are non-disputable. It is only about things which are disputable. It is not promoting a relative approach to everything. It is saying on something which the Bible has not clearly spoken against is disputable. So let's give some modern day example of disputable matters.

How about worship music? It is a debatable matter. Some people would say that there is worship evolution. So it is debatable, do we really think the style of music that you played matters, well some people do. In some churches you go to you only seen an organ and every time you see a guitar that is **no go**. I struggled with this as well. I went to a modern Christian concert and they had like electro-trans music and for me I thought I cannot worship here. I felt like I am back in the club and I was a person who is to club a lot and do nonsense in the club. My previous memories came to my mind when I heard that kind of music, so for me it wasn't possible to worship. So for me I cannot go to that kind of worship session because it is just not something. For some people they like this type of music. We can have two different experiences on same kind of places. I think what is more important is what we are singing and the lyrics. The most important thing in worshiping is what our heart is at that moment when we are actually singing onto the lord. Are we worshiping God? So these are disputable matters.

Charles Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers we had around. He wrote, "*I intend to smoke a good cigar to the glory of God before I go to bed to-night.*"

The Bible says that treat your body as a holy temple. So it is a disputable matter. If I am overweight I am not treating my body as a holy temple.

Spurgeon had other great statements. He said this, "*Growing a beard is a habit most natural, Scriptural, manly and beneficial.*"

Again this is a disreputable matter.

How about gambling? Culturally, speaking gambling in Malaysia will be a no-no but what does the Bible say about gambling.

We do not know but the Bible says the love for money is bad. So if you are gambling to achieve lots of wealth and are willing to stake your family and other things and gambling your life away for that then it is bad. The love for money is bad. I had a grandmother who likes to play a Chinese game called Cherki. So we play it at home with my grandmother and we gamble but would like 20 cents, 1 dollar. The things we do for the greed of money are

bad, but for entertainment and spending time with my grandmother it is fine. I am doing something that she wants to do and we are spending time together. So I am actually doing fellowship and companionship there, but if you are somebody who has an addiction problem with gambling, don't go into fellowships of gambling.

How about Ang Pao packets. Now I have done some great research, I went to Wikipedia and according to that there are different stories out there where Ang Pao packets come from. One story I heard I am just going to focus on that one. It says that these packets came from a tradition of putting two gold coins in it to ward off evil spirits. So back then it was supposed to be in China there was this village and there was this demon that was possessing the village and then there was this family who had this Ang Pao packet and they put two gold coins in and they give it to the children and when the demon will come and see the gold coins will get afraid and then run away, so that is why they always give Ang Pao packets to all the children. So now if we might think it is something spiritual more, so should give these packets to people or not and the Bible does not address it. So again it is a disputable matter, it is cultural.

How about yoga? It is done for exercise and health. But some people will say you are doing something spiritual. Now I think it depends also what kind of yoga class you go to, because you can go to yoga classes where you have this guru who tells you to pray to sun god and they you do meditation and you suppose to know lose yourself and go into nirvana then may be that is not the right yoga class for you to go to, but there might be plenty of yoga classes that you go to where they just do exercise and breathing techniques for your health. Same thing with Tai Chi. I mean do you really believe that there is a chi then we got a problem or we do not have a problem, I do not know. It is a disputable matter.

Pokemon Go, are we catching pocket monsters because that is what it stands for. Is Pokemon Go evil? Does anybody who has caught Pokemons carrying around in their hand phones, a whole bunch of demons? I shouldn't be sarcastic about it because I think people seriously struggle with it and people have serious doubts about it, but I am just saying if we have the problem of Pokemon Go that is one issue, whether or not there is a spiritual connection to the electronic data. Another question is though you should ask is Pokemon Go addictive that might be a better question to ask. Is it taking away the young ones from actually spending time with each other rather they are going on with their devices? Is it taking away the family values? I think a focus on the family has a fantastic article on how you can engage with your children to play Pokemon Go with them. The question asked, if we have this game, we must have a problem with a lot more, for example Chronicles of Narnia written by C.S. Lewis, has monsters in it, has creatures in it just like Pokemon Go, fictional characters. So I think anybody will say that we have a problem with Pokemon Go, we should have a problem with this Christian book and this Christian author. Lord of the Rings talks about creatures and fictional creatures as well. Again do we have a problem with it?

Thor, God of thunder, are we going to watch it. It is just a show, some people think it is just a show but I think there are some people who says, who can I endorse the Nordic god of thunder. How about the movie Noah, where it has taken biblical characters and not

representing them correctly and now giving a misconception of may be biblical truth. Again I think, or it just a movie. So I think these are disputable matters that we have to think about.

What is important, what is disputable and what is not disputable.

We have here on this cultural absolutism. It means that my culture must stand. My culture is before anything else, my culture is important. Then we have got cultural relativism. I am culturally okay with anything. Then we have got biblical relativism. Yeah, the bible is relative depending on how we feel or how we interpret things and then we have got biblical absolutism, whatever the bible says holds. These are the four kinds of things that will make our positions.

If we are biblical relativists, it means we think the Bible depends on my interpretation of things and it depends on how I see things and we are culturally absolute, my culture above anything else. We have this scenario, situational ethics. Depending on which situation it is you go to different countries, different places, they will have a certain ethical position whether it is right or wrong and could be situational. It means that my culture is absolute; the bible will meld itself to it. So we have a situational ethic. Biblical relativism here and cultural relativism together is like the strangest combination, we call it antinomianism. It is a theological antinomianism, it is a belief that there are no moral laws God expects Christianity to obey. Antinomianism means that anything and everything is relative depending on how you feel about it. So if I say that I do not feel that me sleeping with that woman is adultery but sleeping with the other one is, that is antinomianism. When I say, it is relative on how I feel about it, where we do not have any biblical absolutism or no cultural absolutism but we have cultural relativism because I do not care what may culture says about and I do not care what the Bible says about it. I am going to make up my own opinion that is called antinomianism. Then we have biblical absolutism and cultural absolutism. These are traditionalist. The bible says this and my culture interprets this in this way and this is how it has to be done. An example, a lot of missionaries, the early missionaries who went from England into South America, they went into the jungles and started evangelizing people and they came to Christ and they said on Sunday you have to wear a suit, in the mid of a jungle they had to wear a suit. So the pastor would be the only one with tie there and everybody else would be wearing their outfit and slowly they have to wear those things on Sunday and then they started building churches that look exactly like a European church with that little dome with a cross on top. If you go into the jungles in South America you will see abandoned church buildings in the middle of a jungle. That saying to become a Christian is to become a British gentleman. That is what we call traditionalist. So the only way which is the right way is to be biblically absolute, behoove the scripture above everything else, but we are going to be culturally relative. Because we know the same truth might apply differently in different cultures. The same truths might apply differently in different times. So the sentiment of the spirit is the same, it is the same truth but it might apply very differently in a different culture and different place.

For example, alcohol in America during the prohibition periods, so in the Southern Baptist Churches most of them right now they will not drink a single sip of alcohol because it is their

tradition, their culture and their history. Because they have probation period, at that time it was illegal to sell alcohol. There are lot of people who had drunkenness problem so it was a problem back then during the Great Depression. So people decided not to drink any alcohol anymore. Today because of their cultural tradition Southern Baptist missionary sign a piece of paper coming into Malaysia or anywhere else stating 'I will not drink a single sip of alcohol'. Then we have got our Presbyterian brothers who will evangelize you over three cups of beer. It depends on how you interpret and how it is perceived in your culture. Now if you are going to evangelize to somebody who is of a faith where you are not allowed to drink alcohol, maybe you should not drink a glass of wine while doing so. If you are going to talk to a group of alcoholics anonymous walking in with a can of beer it might not be the best approach. So we have to see what is their culture, what is the context that we are talking to and apply biblical scripture into it.

Everything that the bible is very clear about is not a disputable matter. There are things where the bible does not clearly speak about and these are disputable matters. So how to handle disagreements over disputable matters? Now I know that people would say there are disputes about what is disputable and what is not disputable. There is one thing which is not disputable, how we handle disputable matters. It is not disputable how we handle disputable matters. The Bible is clear on how to handle disputable matters and it says this,

Accept one another and how do we do that, welcome the one you disagree with, don't let this hinder fellowship. If it is a disputable matter welcome the person. Don't welcome each other just to quarrel. So we are supposed to accept one another even though we disagree on some of the areas.

Walk in love

15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

So how you behave towards somebody who might think it is a problem it is very important. Don't do things in front of somebody who thinks it is a problem just to prove to them that you are spiritually more mature than them. For example Pokemon Go. If I know that somebody thinks it is catching demons I will not open up my app and say look all the demons I got. I am not going to do those things just to annoy somebody because it is not walking in love. I will just keep my app close and not talk about it and just welcome the brother and don't talk about it ultimately.

How to handle disagreements over disputable matters? So we are supposed to except and there are three things we are not supposed to do. Do not judge, do not despise and do not stumble others.

What are the strong supposed to do? The stronger are the ones who understand their freedom in Christ; they are called not to despise other person. I think probably that would be the sin I would fall into the most. I think I am free in Christ and some way I will despise other person by saying you guys are weak little Christians. We think we are strong, we think we are more

mature and we think we know the truths and therefore we belittle other people who do not have the maturity yet and that is despising them. So we are not supposed to be despising to them, we are not supposed to be say they are terrible people, they do not understand, they are not faithful, they do not read the bible. That is not the attitude to take. So it is a reference to looking down upon a person in a condescending way.

I think all of us in some issues are strong and in some issues are we are the weak. I do not think there is generally somebody who says I am strong in everything and another person who is weak in everything. I think there are some issues where I am strong in and there are some issues I am weak in. For example when I heard the techno music that is where I am weakened because I just couldn't worship during that point of time even though there was nothing evil going on.

3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

I think that is one of the most abused sentences in the Christian world, when people say, I am not supposed to judge and that is what non-Christians also tell us. It is talking about not judgment about disputable matters. It is not talking about non-disputable matters. So when you have a friend who is committing adultery, please go up to them and say it is not okay. You are judging people not on your own authority; you are judging people on the authority of scripture that is the difference. We are not judging based on my opinion, I am judging people based on what the scripture says and I am not judging them to make them feel small, I am judging them because I want them to have a good relationship with Christ. Looking at how you are doing in your life right now and I am judging your situation and I am hoping that you can come in relationship with Christ.

So it does not mean that you say, everybody do what they think is right, it is talking about disputable matters. When the scripture is not clear about it, do not judge.

This refers to how believers condemn one another person on their own authority as oppose to the bible. The reason Paul opposes this is because we do not have the authority to do this.

4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

We do not have the authority to judge in the area of God has authority to judge.

Thirdly, do not be a stumbling block. So do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God. We can be stumbling blocks. There might be people who come in and they might be on their way to get to know Christ, how we treat them and how we behave, you might become a stumbling block to them. How about a girl who walks in barely dressed? Scripturally we would say, yes she should dress modestly. Bible is absolute about it. How are we going to engage with her? She does not know Christ, she might have never read that passage, are we going to kick her out of church and be a stumbling block. It is a difficult question. So there are aspects of it because she might now be a stumbling block for other man. So how do we treat those situations? We have to make sure we are not stumbling them and they are not

stumbling others and be a community of people who care but we do not say therefore it is okay to dress that way. We do not change the truth of the bible, but when you say dress modestly, be careful, may be no Armani shirts, dress modestly. How do we define the term dress modestly? You shouldn't boast of your body and you shouldn't boast of your riches. How disputable those matters are and how we interpret them and we have to be careful that we can become stumbling blocks to others because you can go to one of seminary lectures Anthony Casey who thought biblical interpretation here as well. He told me of a story when he went to a church and he saw a big candy yellow hummer. He already started to judge the church and then he saw the number plate and it said pastor and below it was written, storing up my riches in heaven and immediately he judged that person. He said that the situation was that he was in the wrong because he has no idea who that person is, he has no idea may be a congregation member gave the pastor the car and he could not refuse it because he would have stumbled that congregation member who just nearly became a Christian, how do we know but it might be a stumbling factor how we behave.

When it comes to disputable matters focus on your own behavior rather than others. When you participate or abstain from a behavior do it in honor of the Lord, like Spurgeon who said I will smoke a cigarette to the glory of God. Whichever way you choose remember we will all stand before the judgment at the feet of God, whether you participate or abstain from a behavior be convinced in your mind it is Godly. In other words if you are doubtful about the behavior, do not do it.

Sinning against your conscious that is a very-very important factor here. Now if you believe something is wrong or if you are not sure whether it is right or wrong, the bible says if you do it it is wrong. It is very-very clear. If you are not sure whether wearing a yellow shirt is right or wrong, for whatever reason and you chose to wear yellow shirt it is wrong, you have sinned. If you think it is sin or you doubt whether it is sin and you still do it, it is sin. It is a very important thing to grasp. Because in your heart in your conscious you believe it is wrong or you are not sure and even though you are sure you are willing to go against God or do something against God which you are not sure is right or wrong. So you are training your mind and you are training your conscious to go against God. If am not sure I better don't. even though the whole world would tell me, it's okay to do worship through techno music I will not, am I wrong biblically absolute, yes I am wrong, but if I can saying then I feel like I cannot worship, why should I force myself to do it and I think I am going against God because it brings us memories, it brings thoughts of mine which are unholy then I am sinning against God. If you think eating pork is unholy and then you eat it and you feel that you have sinned against God then you are sinning against God because you are training your mind to do something which is sin, because in your heart of hearts, in your mind you think it is sin and you are choosing still to do it, it has become sin. So something which is clean becomes unclean for the person who thinks it is unclean and I think that is something that we really have to be aware about. I think it is easy for the things that we are certain about. Like if I certain, I am convicted it is sin most of us don't do it. I think the thing that we have to really think about is the things that we are not sure about. The things that we are not certain about whether they are sin or not, can I do this, can I not do this and if you are in that situation and

you are still thinking, is it okay or not for me to do this then the Bible will teach you do not do it. In doubt always go to conservative route.

Nothing in itself is unclean bible says it very clearly. It means everything is clean. That means holding jaw sticks, the jaw sticks are not unclean but if you find it is unclean do not do it. Doing yoga in itself is not unclean, if you find it unclean don't do it. Sweeping your ancestors graves nothing wrong with it, if you think it is unclean do not do it. So I think these are few things that we are tells us ultimately why are things clean because Christ made them clean. Of all the issues Christ made it clean for us.