

Message #48**Romans 14:1-9**

One Sunday at church a medical doctor, architect and lawyer were at church between services discussing the first chapters of the book of Genesis. They specifically were discussing what they thought was the older profession. The doctor said God removed a rib from Adam to create Eve so medical surgery is oldest. The architect said God designed man before He made him so engineering is the oldest. The lawyer said God created everything out of chaos so being an attorney is the oldest. It was attorneys who caused chaos.

One of the favorite past times in some believers is to argue about things not found in the Bible. Someone has a conviction and they want others to have the same conviction so they argue about the conviction.

Over the years I have heard heated arguments about using a Bible other than King James. I have heard heated arguments about using a real deck of cards versus rook cards. I have heard arguments about going to a movie or opera or play. I have heard arguments about music one likes—Henry Mancini, Lawrence Welk and Annuzio Montovani are good, but Hank Williams, Tammy Wynette or the Eagles, Beatles or Beach Boys aren't good. I have heard arguments over drinking a glass of wine or a beer. I have heard arguments over beards, moustaches, wearing makeup, eating in certain restaurants, mixed bathing and watering the lawn on Sunday.

One of the more interesting debates I overheard was between two women in a church we were in years ago who were arguing over whether or not it was legitimate for a husband and wife to dance in the privacy of their own home. One rigid woman who was not married was arguing the couple had no right to dance. The other woman said we have been married for many years so if we don't have a right to dance, what does God think about other things we do?

Now the context of this is critical. When it comes to the subject of gray areas, we are not talking about things the Bible says are sinful. Paul had just given a list of things (Rom. 13:13) that believers should not be doing. This discussion comes after that list. It is true that there are some things the Bible classifies as sinful and we don't want to be near those things, but there are other things that are specifically sinful. These are things that are gray which are not classified as specifically right or wrong.

Paul was no rigid legalist and he realized the grace and freedom that believers have in Jesus Christ. So he decided to address the subject of gray areas. Back in his day there were three main gray areas:

- 1) The gray area of diets - eating meat versus being a vegetarian. **14:2**
O.T. law forbade certain meats and some meats were sacrificed to idols.
- 2) The gray area of days - observe Sabbath days or special days or not observe them. **14:5**
Not about Sunday Church, this is about Sabbath days, Heathen and Jewish feasts & festivals.
- 3) The gray area of drinking - drinking wine versus not drinking wine. 14:21

Now in view of Paul's admonition in **13:14**, "make no provision for the flesh," one believer might say these things are flesh provisions and wrong and another believer might say no they aren't. Paul decides to address the subject of gray areas and what he says in these verses is this:

WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO JUDGE EACH OTHER ON GRAY AREA ISSUES, BUT WE NEED TO BE WORKING ON OUR OWN LIVES BASED ON THE FACT THAT WE BELONG TO THE LORD AND WE WILL BE JUDGED BY THE LORD.

I want you to again notice the importance Paul places on the way we think and the use of our minds: opinions (v. 1); judge (v. 3, 4), mind (v. 5). **Spirituality is not a matter of how we feel; it is a matter of how we think with our minds in honest evaluation.**

Now this does not mean that parents cannot set rules for their children and expect them to honor those rules while in the home. This does not mean that an employer cannot set rules for the work place and expect employees to honor them. This does not mean that a school cannot set standards and expect students to honor those standards. What this text is saying is that we have no right to become the judge of another person's spirituality based on gray area issues.

You have a right to your own convictions. You do not have a right to assume your convictions should be everyone's convictions.

Now there are three reasons why we have no right to judge each other on gray areas:

REASON #1 – Because this is a command of God. **14:1-3a**

The verbs "accept" (14:1), "regard with contempt" (14:3) and "judge" (14:3) are all imperatives, which means they are commands given to us from God. So this gray area issue is a critical issue in the mind of God.

Now before we launch into this, we need to clearly and carefully understand and Biblically define the weak believer versus the strong believer.

The word "weak" comes from a verb asqenew that refers to one God considers to be sick, weak, frail, feeble, lacking strength. This word means the person is not strong but sickly as far as doctrine and spirituality (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 64). This word is used by Paul two times here: once in **verse 1** and once in **verse 2**.

When we examine the context, God defines and classifies who are the weak and who are the strong:

1) The Weak believer.

The weak believer is one with all the scruples. The weak believer is the one who is rigid and believes that by not eating meat he is more spiritual (14:2).

He thinks that by being a vegetarian he is greater in his relationship and standing with God than the one who eats meat. However, Paul is very clear to point out that this one is “weak in the faith.” The legalist does not grasp the grace faith system and thinks the legalistic rules adds something to the faith. Weak believers devote themselves to a rigid, ascetic existence. They invent all kinds of rules and standards. They live by a philosophy that says, “handle not, taste not, and touch not” (Col. 2:21).

2) The Strong believer.

The strong believer is one without the scruples. He doesn’t live by the rules and high standards. He believes he has liberty to enjoy all kinds of things, including meats, wine and life. He does not have the strong convictions that one weak has.

The fact is, in most churches the weaker believer will be viewed as the real spiritual believer and the one who is really well-grounded in doctrine and theology will be viewed as the weaker believer.

Now each of these two classifications of believers has dangers that need to be avoided:

Dangers for the weak believers who are immature: 14:3b

The main danger for the weak believers is the danger of judgment. They spend their lives judging others by their codes. They are the judge and the jury. The weak believer judges people and if they don’t measure up to their rules and regulations, they judge them as not spiritual and perhaps not even saved.

Dangers for the strong believers who are mature: 14:1, 3a

There are two dangers for the mature believer:

(Mature Believer Danger #1) - The danger of verbal arguments. 14:1

The mature believer has a tendency to get into arguments and debates that can destroy the weaker brother or sister. The word “passing judgment on his opinions” literally refers to questioning and debating and reasoning. The strong believer is up for strong heated arguments and it can really devastate the weaker believer.

(Mature Believer Danger #2) - The danger of mental contempt. 14:3

The word “contempt” means to look down on or consider as nothing. The mature believer has a tendency to consider the weaker brother as being a nothing of no value, who doesn’t know what he is talking about or believes. The mature believer can actually hold the immature believer in contempt.

Both of these dangers are wrong. God says My command to both of you is stop it.

REASON #2 – Because we all are the property of God. **14:3b-4**

We are not to waste our time judging each other over gray areas because when we do we are making judgments against something that belongs to God.

There are to be judgments made at times in the church regarding individuals.

Now there are two main reasons why we don't want to waste our time judging each other over gray areas:

Reason #1 - Because God has accepted the person. **14:3b**

The verb “accepted” indicates God brought the person to Himself. God took this particular individual and elected him and pulled him into Himself and saved him. He grafted the believer into Himself. So the person belongs to God. Now if God has done that for someone, who in the world are we to judge them over gray areas?

Reason #2 - Because God owns him. **14:4**

The pronoun “another” is another of the same kind. The point is who in the world are we to judge each other over gray areas when both of us are in the family of God and serve God.

We are accountable to God. We stand or fall before God. Any who have believed on Jesus Christ are the property of God. He is the master; He is the owner. We are not.

REASON #3 – Because we all have personal individual responsibility to God. **14:5-9**

These are very important verses.

- 1) There are various degrees of knowledge, maturity and growth.
- 2) When it comes to gray areas there is flexibility in thinking on various issues.

We are not a bunch of clones and for a church to come up with some legalistic set of rules for people to follow is to disregard what is specifically taught right here.

Now one of the gray area problems was the problem of days. More than likely, the Jews thought the Sabbatical days should be observed, whereas the Gentiles believed that every day was a day to live for God and meeting on the first day of the week, Sunday, was sufficient.

Arguments still exist over days. Some believe on Sunday you should never eat in a restaurant. Some think that Sunday is a day to eat pot roast and take a nap and that's it. You cannot ride bikes or shoot basketballs, but you can take a car ride as long as you don't stop for gas.

There are three main points Paul wanted developed concerning individual responsibility:

Point #1 - Each individual is to think in terms of his own conscience. **14:5**

Your conscience is your inner self that assesses what you believe and how you behave and reacts to how you behave in view of what you believe.

There is an old saying, let your conscience be your guide. We are not discussing what is sinful, we are discussing gray issues.

The point Paul makes here is that if we cannot do something in good conscience then we should not do it at all. When it comes to gray areas, we need to think about what it is we are going to do. If you can thank God and enjoy it as something from God, you have liberty to do it. If you can't, you don't have liberty.

When I taught at GRSBM, they had rules and I signed my name to those rules. Some of them I didn't fully agree with, but as long as I was there, I followed them. I was responsible to submit to the authority over me and I did.

Now as we grow and mature, we should be able to decipher what is right and true according to the word of God and what isn't. My mind and conscience may think something is okay and your mind and conscience may think it is not okay. Neither of us may be wrong, but may just think differently. What is wrong is if we start judging each other.

Point #2 - Each individual is to think in terms of God. **14:6**

What is established here is that it is possible for two believers to be doing just the opposite of each other on a gray area and be doing it for the glory of God.

The thing to always remember is what we are doing or not doing is being evaluated by God.

One of the real characters of church history was Charles Spurgeon. He was known to enjoy smoking a good cigar or pipe. One Sunday a friend of Spurgeon's was speaking in his church and didn't know Spurgeon liked to smoke once in a while. So he went on a diatribe in his pulpit against the use of tobacco. When he got done, Spurgeon stood up and walked to the pulpit and said that was a very fine message, now I am going to dismiss the service in prayer and go to my study and smoke my pipe to the glory of God.

Another time Spurgeon was traveling and was traveling first class in a railway carriage. Some antagonist to Spurgeon said, "Mr. Spurgeon, what are you doing up here in first class?" He then said to Spurgeon, "I am riding in the third class carriage and because I want to take care of the Lord's money." Spurgeon said, "I am riding up here in first class because I want to take care of the Lord's servant."

Another time a student of Spurgeon said to him, I received a good box of cigars as a gift and I don't know what to do with them. Spurgeon said, "Give them to me and I'll smoke them to the Glory of God." Here is the point. Spurgeon knew he had liberty in Christ on gray areas. He knew he was accountable to God. He made up his own mind, which he had the right to do.

Point #3 - Each individual is to think in terms of eternity. **14:7-9**

What we all need to realize is that we live or die for the Lord. If we have believed in Jesus Christ, we belong to the Lord. We are forever secure in that. Gray areas have nothing to do with that reality.

We live to the Lord and we die to the Lord. Everyone who has believed in Jesus Christ belongs to the Lord.

So don't waste your precious time fighting over gray areas. Rather invest learning and living and loving for the Lord.