

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon: The Principle of the Weaker Person/Stronger Person, Romans 14

Date Preached: August 5, 2018

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INTRODUCTION: With Romans, we have a wonderful book that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome. The Christians came from diverse backgrounds—they were coming together to form the church. There were groups of people who had never associated before that were now eating together, fellowshiping together, and worshipping God together. Some in that group had been raised as believers since they were born, and then others in that group were people who came out of pagan backgrounds. There was a real diversity in this group of people in this church at Rome. Paul wrote them quite a bit of instructions it's what we call the book of Romans. And, in Chapter 14 he talks about something that's so important not only to the people back then but it's important to us today we really need to understand Romans Chapter 14.

First, YIELD TO THE WEAKER CHRISTIAN

SCRIPTURE: Romans 14:1-4 *“¹Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ²One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.”*

EXPLANATION: The spirit of this chapter is found in verse 1: *Don't quarrel over disputable matters.*

All of us come from different backgrounds. Our faith journeys vary yet as Christians all roads meet at the person of Jesus. In this sanctuary, we have people who've been all over the world and people who've never left the area. We have some who grew up in the city, some who grew up in the country. Some of you were raised in the church, some of you were not. Some of you came to faith in Jesus as

children, some as adults. And, because of those differences in backgrounds, we carry different traditions and beliefs. I don't mean different beliefs about Jesus because we're all here because of one reason and it's because of Jesus. If it weren't for Jesus we wouldn't be here today. This diverse crowd wouldn't be here. We would be doing other things but because of Christ our roads have intersected right here.

In these verses, Paul uses food as an illustration. Some people had been raised to believe that eating meat was wrong. There are faith groups today who believe that, and some who believe eating certain kinds of meat is wrong. During the Old Testament days, God dictated what meat was good and what was bad. And in the days Jesus lived Jews were still following those rules.

ILLUSTRATION: In Acts chapter 10 Peter had a dream:

SCRIPTURE: Peter 10:9-15 *“⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”*

¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

EXPLANATION: We've interpreted that scripture to mean that the Old Testament rules didn't matter anymore. That was a shocker to the people back then.

But Paul makes it clear to the people in Rome do not flaunt your freedom to eat whatever they wanted if others weren't comfortable with it. And he said to the others not to judge those who eat whatever they want.

APPLICATION: What's the everyday application of this? Don't purposefully offend people.

Let's go back to what I said was the spirit behind this chapter— *do not quarrel over disputable matters*. We should yield to the weaker Christian.

Second, YIELDING TO THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST IS WHAT REALLY MATTERS

SCRIPTURE: Romans 14:5-13 “⁵ *One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.* ⁶ *Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.* ⁷ *For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone.* ⁸ *If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.* ⁹ *For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.*

¹⁰ *You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.* ¹¹ *It is written:*

“‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

¹² *So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.*

¹³ *Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.”*

EXPLANATION: Yielding to the Lordship of Christ is what really matters. He talks about judging others for their actions. In today's world the “judge not” term is misused. If somebody even says they disagree with something in the news or they disagree with something people are quick to say what does the Bible say about judging? There are scriptures that talk about judging but in this particular scripture Paul instructs the people in Rome not to judge each-other.

ILLUSTRATION: About thirty years ago, I served a church part-time while going to college. In the church was a very active family and after they missed several

Sundays I inquired about what was going on. I found out they were going to Dollywood doing other fun things on Sundays. You see the husband and father of the family had trauma from his service in Vietnam many years prior. His doctor said he needed to recreate his mind and that was what he was doing.

I thought it was just awful. I really believed that it was a mistake for him to lead his family like that. I thought the doctor was wrong because of course I was 21 or 22 and knew more than the doctor.

But, had he not followed his doctor's orders he may have cracked up. You see, it was not my business to judge him. And I've since learned through my own military training that recreation and regaining one's capacity to rest is good therapy when dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Today that man is doing very well, according to his daughter.

APPLICATION: Don't quarrel over disputable matters. Mind your own business and remember: We never know what others have been through or are going through right now!

Third, GOD WORKS WITH US ALL DIFFERENTLY

SCRIPTURE: Romans 14: 14-21 “¹⁴ *I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.* ¹⁵ *If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.* ¹⁶ *Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.* ¹⁷ *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,* ¹⁸ *because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.*

¹⁹ *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.* ²⁰ *Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.* ²¹ *It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.”*

EXPLANATION: Why would someone have freedom in one area of life and another not have the same freedom? That's a good question and I believe it boils down to how Jesus relates to us and how we relate to him. In other passages of scripture, Jesus told one man to sell all he had and give it to the poor. He told another man not to follow him and not to worry about burying his father. Jesus had different prescriptions for different people. Why? Because—he is the master physician and knows exactly what we need.

ILLUSTRATION: If I am invited to speak at another church, I ask what English translation the pastor uses and how he dresses. Why? Because I am the guest and don't want to be a stumbling block. If a congregation has only heard the King James Version, they might be put off if I didn't use it. If the pastor wears a coat and tie they might be put off if I wear something else.

If I know a family chooses not to eat out on Sunday, I am not going to ask them to join me at the restaurant on Sunday and I am certainly not going to rub it in their faces.

ILLUSTRATION: A woman I know would not shop at grocery stores that sold alcohol – I think they all do today. She wouldn't eat at Pizza Hut because they sold beer. She had a strong conviction about that and I did not. It would have been wrong for me to ridicule her for her convictions and it would have been wrong for her to ridicule me for my lack of conviction on such a disputable matter. Picture it this way – at Hickory Plaza, there is a Pizza Hut and a Cici's Pizza. Let's say her family and my family arrive at the parking lot at the same time and park by each other. We say hello and her family goes into Cici's and my family goes into Pizza Hut. Let's say we meet again in the parking lot after we eat...we greet again and then depart. It would have been wrong if we lectured each other. Perhaps the woman who chose Cici's might tell her kids, "We eat at Cici's because I don't want to support businesses with alcohol, but when you are older you'll have to make up your own mind" And, you'd better put that tag on the end! If you don't, we all know what will happen.

APPLICATION: You'll have to figure out for yourself how this applies in your everyday life. If you feel something is bad for particular reasons, keep in mind someone else may feel differently, and vice-versa. Again, let's yield to the weaker

Christian without declaring we are doing that – wouldn't that be arrogant? – And let's yield to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

I know the Bible teaches freedom, I have heard a whole lot of bondage preaching in my life you know guilt and shame raises money. Bondage preaching gets people down the aisle to make false commitments because they feel guilty for that moment. I think freedom preaching ought to accomplish more. In my giving since I'm not required by the law to give 10 percent as people were in the Old Testament I'm gaming with myself all the time, how much more can I give? How can I cut this corner so I give more over here? I think about that with my time I think about that with my preaching. Since I am not under any particular rules, what can I do to make the message as applicable and easy to understand as possible? You see the freedom we have in Christ? I cannot imagine living a life of bondage. I cannot imagine living with a theology behind that life of I've got to please God today in order to be saved.

ILLUSTRATION: I read an article this week to the staff about an Uber driver who had a rosary hanging from his mirror. And, he told his rider that he's never had an accident in this car with this rosary hanging from his mirror but that a friend of his had removed the rosary from his mirror and had an accident that day. You know what? That is that is just superstition. You know we could use the Bible as superstition, I mean if you are carrying around a New Testament, in your pocket because you think it gives you power, you may as well be carrying a rabbit's foot.

APPLICATION: You see I can't live under that type of bondage; I have to live under freedom. The word of God is powerful sharper than any two-edged sword. But, do you know what is right here? (Holding up the Bible) Paper and ink. It's the meaning; it's the truth behind the scripture— that's important. It should influence our lives every day it should influence how we think it should influence how we live and how we relate to others.

Fourth, A STRONG DEVOTIONAL LIFE IS IMPORTANT

Paul provides the best possible closure to this topic in verses 22 and 23.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 14: 22-23 ^{“22} *So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself*

by what he approves. ²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

CONCLUSION: Navigating this life is not easy, and the older I am the more difficult that navigation becomes! We must seek the Lord’s will in our lives, which I must say this is not an easy thing! Seeking God’s will require us to really pray that the Spirit of God would be released in our lives so that we can understand God’s will for our lives. You know what— that takes a lot of work. It’s an effort for me to get Paul Gunn out of the picture and listen to God. And, if you will admit the truth it takes effort on your part too.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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