

The Rock: 11-7-2021**Romans 14****First reading:**

Title: Disputable matters (Pt.1)

Scripture: Romans 14:1-12 (black bible
Pg. 892-893)

Theme:

While the Bible has much that is clear by way of right and wrong, can and cannot do, there are things which fall into what we call disputable matters (grey areas)

Introduction:

N. T. Wright speaking on this particular section of Romans in his commentary writes:

"HE begins with the issue that, we may suppose, lay close to the heart of it all. In Antioch Peter, Barnabas and others had originally eaten with gentile believers, but had separated themselves after 'certain persons came from James' (Gal. 2:11-14). This is not an identical issue, but it belongs in the same family of disputes, at the center of which lay the centuries old Jewish taboos regarding food, both what to eat, how to prepare

it, and with whom, and in what condition to eat it.

Like any such deep rooted cultural issue, it would emerge in different situations, but the underlying family resemblance; and it is not difficult to imagine the context of the present earning."

-Romans Commentary Pg. 735

As we look then at this passage with that in mind, verse one becomes essential as we move through this:

-Romans 14:1 (ESV)

"As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions."

We are not to quarrel over opinions. Paul right away is setting the tone for that which is to follow. For he is not going to be talking here about doctrinal issues, what we understand to be non-negotiable truths of the Bible.

That must be clearly understood as we venture into the murky waters of conscience and opinion over "Non-salvific matters."

So, a couple principles to remember: Alistair Begg is right when he reminds us that the main things are always the plain

things. That means then, that if it is plain, it is main. If it is not plain, it is not main.

Things such as creation, gender, marriage for examples -these are not vague issues, nor are they negotiable.

We must understand that: "In the beginning God created." -Genesis 1:1

That is a non-negotiable truth. Lose that and we lose the framework for all we believe. Now, how He did, How long the universe has been here, and how long the earth has been here -open for discussion -that may unsettle some, but there it is.

Gender and marriage: Non-negotiable. God made man, and woman. Full stop. Regardless of how one may feel about it. But it is not something to redefine, or to debate based upon how one feels at a given moment in time.

Marriage as well. Non-negotiable. It is not a cultural construct, nor is it even a Judeo-Christian institution. Although it is there in Scripture.

Marriage is a creation ordinance. From the beginning God defined marriage as: One man, one woman, heterosexual, life-long monogamous relationship.

Now, with all that said, these types of clear-cut things are not what we are tackling here in Romans 14 today and then again on the 21st. Pastor Lisa-Marie will be speaking next weekend as I will be away.

The Story:

Part of why we are here this morning, as I don't feel as though I am ready or qualified to tackle this letter of Paul's to the Roman Christians, perhaps some day.

But I have had five different people come to me with concerns over potentially losing their jobs due to vaccine mandates.

Can I file a religious exemption? What's the right thing to do, the wrong thing to do? Most especially as the world continues to press in on our abilities to legitimately live out our faith walk and hold to our conscience.

I thought it good to come to Romans 14, where Paul talks about opinions (Disputable matters-NIV). Things such as food, drink, causing others to stumble, and so on.

A couple of things, or take aways I want us to remember as we go through this chapter:

1-Do not pass judgement: Doing so de-humanizes.

Again, as I have said we are talking about questions of conscience and disputable matters. Not doctrinal truths.

2-Do not cause another to stumble: It de-values.

You see, everything we do needs to be done in the context of "the other", that image-bearer whom Jesus died for.

The key for us being verse 17:

-Romans 14:17 (ESV)

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

This is why we can fall on differing sides of so many issues of our time, just as they did in Paul's time. But we have to be very careful, not to tripe off and become divided over our secondary issues and opinions, making them primary and even our "marker of spiritual maturity and salvation".

That is dangerous, and it is how the world at large functions. So, let's look at what Paul looks at and tackles in the first 12 verses because that is all we

will have time for today. Doing so, because there is much we can learn as we struggle with our own "food and drink" issues.

Again, key verse to note: 1, 4b and 7:

-Romans 14:1 (ESV)

"As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions."

-Romans 14:4b (ESV)

"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."

-Romans 14:7 (ESV)

"For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself."

So many things have come our way since March 2020, and each day brings increased divisiveness over things such as vaccines, masks, schooling, personal rights versus responsibilities.

Frankly, division is nothing new. What causes it is what changes with the times. Paul is dealing with things here that are causing division among God's people in Rome. Specifically Roman Christians and Jewish Christians.

He defines for us that quarreling over each other's opinions, as if it were a doctrinal stance instantly puts us at odds with one another.

How do I know? Two words -Vax, anti-vax. This is not a Biblical issue (doctrinal), but it is one that we are dealing with as a deep matter of conscience.

As I've said, I've had to address and to help / talk about not just the mandate and demand, but the actual potential of losing one's way of making a living.

You will find two camps, and it seems that the Church is not above the fray. Rather, in so many ways, it has turned into a Biblical issue and argument.

Somehow, each side using the Bible as the tool which explains each position as right while the other is wrong.

While Paul is not talking mask / vaccine, he is talking opinion AND our standing before God within the family of God. In other words, what makes us Christian is that we are found In HIM (Jesus), not that we believe in Him as an historical figure, or that we believe /. Perform certain ways because being good is better than being bad.

No. It is that we are found to be in HIM.

-Romans 14:8 (ESV)

"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."

Paul begins this challenge really in verse 2:

-Romans 14:2-3 (ESV)

"One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 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."

Using food issues (a seriously divisive issue in his time) as the example. The Jewish believers in Jesus struggled with the diet of the Roman Christians.

Believers both, but holding different views on food bought in the market, potentially sacrificed to idols and unkosher.

Can I have bacon and cheese with my double burger? One would say: It's not a burger without them while the other -not so much.

They eat spinach, Kale and lettuce instead, thinking that the other is so

far away from spiritually pleasing the Lord, they argue about food.

You see, we all somehow think that way, and eventually get to that place. Perhaps over different things besides dinner menus, but we get there. Separating into camps with different badges that we wear to insure people know which tribe we belong to.

We have some of the same issues today: Food drink, politics, and others we could name.

I've heard my republican friends ask: "How can anyone who believes in Jesus and is "saved", be a democrat? The funny thing is, I have democrat friends who ask the same question of my republican friends.

Both are absolutely wrong. They are starting in the wrong spot, forgetting that Jesus isn't about republican, democrat or any system / party. That isn't HIS KINGDOM.

If we are found In Him, some of us might eat just Kale (that would not be me!) and crazy as it sounds, some of us might vote differently than the person sitting next to us.

And still, both are Christians. Why? Because it is being In Him, knowing Jesus

as Lord and King that makes you a Christian.

We stand or fall before God based on that alone -and He is able to make us stand under the weight of it all. Paul asks the right question, and then answers for us:

-Romans 14:4 (ESV)

"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."

This is precisely Paul's point as he tackles feast days and special days.

-Romans 14:5-6 (ESV)

"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. 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."

Paul makes very clear what everyone's conscience should be shooting for. And it is not to build your case and your tribe

to bring along side of you for your defense.

Three times here he says: in honor of the LORD

Twice he states: Gives thanks to God.

Division happens when we stop asking the question of ourselves: Is what I am doing honoring the Lord and giving God thanks for it?

Now, once again, Paul is not talking about clear cut doctrinal directives or do and don't. He is dealing with secondary issue and sometime third-tier concerns.

Think of it as three concentric circles:

The smallest in the center is the "essentials". The next one out and a bit bigger, let's call: traditions. The last one and the biggest and farthest away from the center, let's call: opinions.

Now, let me ask a question: In what circle do the majority of our arguments happen? Traditions and opinions.

Let's keep that in mind as we move quickly forward, most especially in light of our own times. Reminding ourselves once again that in all things, "we are the Lord's" (vs 7-8).

N.T. Wright again is helpful:

"This proves more than Paul needs to prove for the immediate argument, but it points, as we shall see, to the larger issue that stands behind the entire section. The Gospel announcement that Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah, is the Lord of the whole world is thus appealed to as THE REASON for unity across the barriers of custom and taboo."

Romans commentary Pg. 737

Christ died and lived again. Ruling as Lord means for us, belonging to the Lord. That is our victory and the only badge to wear and tribe to belong to.

Made up of every tribe, nation, people and language. This is the victory King Jesus gives to us. Also, He is the example set for us as to how to live sacrificially in the service to others.

That means then. That issues such as we are confronted with today become just as hard to sort out as the food and festivals were in Paul's day.

Why? Because matters of secondary and third-tier importance we will, not may, but will differ greatly and as brothers and sisters in Christ we must remain unified.

As verse 10 states:

-Romans 14:10 (ESV)

"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."

We cannot and should not pass judgement on those who think differently on these types of matters. In other words: Don't tribe off into the vax / anti-vax camp. The Dem / Republican camp and so on.

We stand or fall before the Lord ourselves regarding these things, and our consciences need to be clear on these matters.

Well, what do I do then, Pastor, if my house is divided over these things? How am I to move forward if doing so means - like it does right now -losing my job as a result of my choice and stance.

I want to fall on the sword of Jesus when he was asked to force one brother to give a portion of an inheritance to another:

-Luke 12:14b (ESV)

"Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?"

I have lots of opinions, but as I said again this week, opinions are like armpits without deodorant, and opinions are not to be preached as if they were the end all be all.

Therefore verses 11-12:

-Romans 14:11-12 (ESV)

"for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God."

A couple things on this and then we are finished. Remember, the end game is always the Lordship and the worship of Jesus Christ, our King.

He gave us everything, including His very life that we may be children of God. Thinking through all of these questions with Our Lord Jesus in mind and from that perspective of "the other."

Jesus didn't die for Himself, He died for you, He died for me and for every human being who will call upon His name for salvation. He is our all in all.

We are not used to being pressed in against as the church. Fearful of what will be the next line we will be forced

to cross. Further, at times, violating our conscience before our God.

Unity is essential. Biblical perspective is essential. It is why we are looking at Romans 14 today. If our consciences are driven by "my rights" as a citizen, while that is NOT wrong, as a Christian, it is starting in the wrong spot.

I am in no way minimizing that or taking away the validity of that. I would live nowhere else. However, I am sad and broken hearted now at how off of our foundational moorings we have gone as a nation.

Just to keep everyone focused right, that didn't start for me 10 months ago. It has been that way for me for years - regardless of party. Spiritually and morally, we are unhinged!

But the constitution did not die on the Cross and rise again. Jesus our master and king did. We stand or fall on Him alone.

So, as husbands, wives, families and the Church, unity is the key. That doesn't mean uniformity. Households will come down on different sides of issues, that is not bad, unless unity is fractured.

Lisa and I do not agree on every issue - but we are united in our differences

because of Christ, and because of that,
our goal in all things is Christ.

I am more concerned with the health and
well-being of your homes, your marriages,
and your families. Jobs come and go, a
marriage is to be forever and it is to be
healthy, even when spouses disagree.

Jesus is to be the center of it all.