

The Rock: 11-21-2021**Romans 14****First reading:**

Title: Disputable matters (Pt.2)

Scripture: Romans 14:13-23 (black bible
Pg. 892-893)

Theme:

The difficult and dynamic tension of the gray areas of life, are what tend to keep us divided and unfocused.

Remembering what the kingdom of God is about, helps us to stay grounded in the important and clear things, while navigating the fog.

Introduction:

As we close out our little journey here in Romans 14 and prepare for the Christmas season, I want to remind us all that the key verse here in Romans 14 (and there are many) is really verse 17.

Paul defines for us, in that statement, what God's kingdom is all about, and as a result, what we ought to be about.

Our problem, as much as we don't wish to admit it, is that we do not like living

in the gray areas. Life would be much simpler if it was clear cut, black and white, get in line and so on.

By way of follow up from our last teaching, I just want to say that my deep concern in all these things in relation to loss of jobs, homes and marriages is that you are healthy on the home front.

I don't want to say I don't care about jobs and one's livelihood, I do. Yet, if your marriage and home is healthy and unified, even in differing opinions, you can and will withstand any storm that comes your way.

If your home and marriage is not healthy, it doesn't matter how good of a job you have and or keep, you will struggle greatly. That is why I am more concerned with healthy marriages, families and homes than I am about jobs.

Secondly, to keep in mind as we continue this morning, it is clear to anyone who observes culture and our condition today, that the essentials have become opinions, and opinions have become the essentials.

Making all these issues and concerns much harder to navigate as we have anchored ourselves two feet above the ground, firmly planted in mid-air.

The Story:

So, with those things in mind, let's look at the rest of this chapter.

I have had more than a few people tell me that the message was a hard one- focused as always, on Jesus, but a hard one.

Convicting was the word that was used more than once. It was, and is. It should be, as the Bible speaks to the truths as God defines them, unchanging and unyielding.

If we, and that includes me, are honest, that actually conflicts with our views and opinions more often than we want to admit. Thus, the discomfort.

As a pastor, I am preaching to myself as much, if not more so, than I am to you. If I am not allowing the Holy Spirit to do His conforming work in me, how can I demand that you allow Him to do it within you?

Second, I've been told I am a braver man than most to say these things. To that, I say; No, no I am not. In fact, I am probably the biggest coward in the room this morning.

It is an unsettling thing, and a fearful thing to stand on the clear truths of Scripture in a world where the only absolute truth is that there are no absolute truths.

That does not make me brave, it simply means I am being faithful, at least trying to be faithful to the text as it sits before us.

I hope you are too, every time you open your bibles and are confronted with things that make you uncomfortable. Thinking as you read: Show me yourself Lord, show me myself, and show me Jesus in what I am reading.

Why? So that we can be conformed to Him and make much of Him in this world.

Now, onto verse 13:

-Romans 14:13 (ESV)

"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."

He continues here with the theme that we should not pass judgement about disputable matters. This is something we all have to fight against within ourselves. Why?

Because we think we are right, or worse, know we are, and that's when our feelings and pride are stepped on when someone challenges us, we tend to defend by de-valuing or de-humanizing the other person.

Even in the non-negotiables we are challenged to always value the other person. Doing our best in order that Jesus be kept at the center of it all.

Paul wrestled through these things in his letter to the Corinthian church.

-1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (ESV)

"For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings."

We never want to win the fight and lose the person! Especially over matters that are not prime. It's in that moment when we can be right and wrong all at the same time, because we have lost the person whom Jesus died for, in order that we can

go home vindicated in our opinions of things.

All things to all people. Paul is not compromising any Biblical truth, rather he is valuing the other person as an image bearer, to the point where cultural, societal, economical, and gender barriers are not in the way of sharing the gospel.

Why? Because it is the gospel that is supreme and prime, not our opinions of food, drink or anything else. Let's look at verses 14-15:

-Romans 14:14-15 (ESV)

"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. 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."

Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of which "I am the worst", to quote Paul. He did this by His death, resurrection and ascension.

Jesus took the penalty we deserved, and gave to us a life He earned. We need to remember that always when we look at

others and judge them based on our point of view and opinion.

Jesus leveled the playing field for us. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. So, what we know to be right and good Paul tells us:

-Romans 14:16-17 (ESV)

"So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Again, the key verse of what the Kingdom is really all about. It is not about my bacon double cheeseburger and beer. It's not about my position on masks, vaccines, or politics -

It is about righteousness, peace and joy.

Part of the reason we can become so miserable and unhappy is that we lose our focus on this. We become unsettled because we aren't getting our way, perhaps feeling like, if everyone would just be like me and do things my way, life would be so much better. And it would, for you, at least until the next time someone doesn't do every single thing you want.

But that is not what we, as Christians, are called to. In fact, that kind of thinking is what got us into this whole mess in the first place.

Both Adam and Eve thought they knew better and wanted what they wanted. They did the one thing God told them not to do, and it's been a fight to get back to Eden ever since.

No, it's about serving each other:

-Romans 14:18-19 (ESV)

"Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."

We serve our King. We look to reach everyone with the truth of the Gospel - that God so loved the world.. We serve each other.

Doing so in such a way that draws people to Jesus, not a cause or opinion, but to Jesus. Paul cared about one thing, and that was to make Jesus known to as many people as possible.

-1 Corinthians 1:23-24 (ESV)

"...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called,

both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

It is still the same today. A stumbling block which offends people (even within the Church), and a foolish thought that causes others to mock and ridicule such crazy beliefs.

Our goal is to do what makes for peace and for what builds up. For it is there where we discover the fundamental difference between a peace-keeper and a peace-maker.

A peace-keeper does just that -anything necessary to keep the peace. A little adjustment here, a compromise there, anything to keep the peace and try to make everyone happy.

Even if doing so violates the truth, for the greater good of “peace”, so long as we all just get along. But anyone with a quick observation of it all can tell you, that never works. Each compromise drives the wedge between people even deeper.

A peace-maker however, is one who seeks reconciliation without violating truth. Pastor Jeff preached around this concept some time back when he spoke on Romans 5:

-Romans 5:1-2 (ESV)

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Easy? Never, but it is right, and it is what we are called to. A peace-maker points always toward Christ, encouraging by grace, through faith to come to Him the one who gives us peace with God the Father.

For it is then, and only then can we ever even attempt to have genuine peace with each other.

Solomon tells us:

-Proverbs 16:7 (ESV)

"When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Thus, the statement by Jesus in the sermon on the mount:

-Matthew 5:9 (ESV)

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

We all become sons of God -not sons and daughters, but sons. Equal and adopted Kings kids.

This building each other up instead of tearing each other down is so important. Because if we don't build one another up, we will, instead, find ourselves doing what Paul warned us about in verse 20:

-Romans 14:20 (ESV)

"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."

Destroying the work of God over food, drink and other matters. Harsh? Yes, but that is exactly what happens when we fight and demand our own way.

Paul would rather us give up everything instead of risking that happening. Look at verse 21:

-Romans 14:21 (ESV)

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

Disputable matters are always to be kept to ourselves in this context:

-Romans 14:22 (ESV)

"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."

Now, this doesn't mean that if we are asked our view or opinion, that we lie and evade the question.

We answer in genuine humility and with the understanding that we are expressing our opinion and not a doctrinal truth.

We always keeps it within the framework of:

1-My opinion, my position -whenever answering. Knowing that this is a non-salvific issue and the person you are talking to may very well think differently.

2- If you are out and about, always be thinking of the other, and not yourself. Don't get mad, it's right there in the text.

If I cause someone else to stumble, I have made my desires and my opinions more important than that person, whom Jesus died for.

Remember, he didn't die for our opinions, he died for us.

But I / we have to be careful too, that we don't violate our own consciences by doing something we wouldn't normally do, simply because everyone else in the crowd is doing it.

You see, we are back again to the difficult and dynamic tension of the gray areas. Our inability to live with this speaks more to our pride, than it does the Holy Spirit in us ,who is able to make us to stand in these things, within unity as a body - in the midst of so many vague and varying positions and opinions.

If we are in Christ, unified as His people, loving others as He loves, moving about in this world with His perspective, we can engage and love even those who are violently opposed to the gospel.

Because you need to remember, it is NOT you they hate, it is Jesus. You just happen to be His representative in this world.

So, we stand, feeling the pressure of an opposing culture and even opposing views amongst ourselves, and still, we know King Jesus rules and reigns in and through it all. God is sovereign and has it all under control.

If we simply remember that we are all sinners saved by grace, simple debtors to mercy alone, it becomes so much easier to walk these out with the goal making much of Jesus, and not ourselves.

Making much of His redemptive work on the cross and very little about my bacon-

burger and beer, or masks, or shots, or political parties, or anything else that we feel the need to argue over.