**WITHOUT EXCUSE**

**Romans 14 – “Disputable Matters”**

**From last week:**

**Romans 13:1 “**Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”

It’s important to know the context of the book of Romans, Paul writing to the church in Rome where the Jews were kicked out by Claudius in 49 AD, but were allowed to return under Nero in 54 AD, but the church was under heavy persecution. Paul knew that if they were marked as total insurrectionist under Rome they would’ve been wiped out entirely, by giving them this wise counsel, he preserved the church’s existence in Rome where it thrived for generations.

It's important to note however as we apply this principal, that many times in scripture when the people of God were faced with a choice of obeying God or men, the Lord blessed them when they were willing to honor God over governing authorities.(Examples: The Hebrew midwives during the time of Moses, Daniel and his friends in Babylon, the apostles in Jerusalem

**Acts 5:27-29**“The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. **28**“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

**Acts 5:29“**Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!”

There may be time where we will be challenged with these issues in our lives. We should be subject to governing authorities, but obey God not men.

**THIS WEEK:**

Paul addresses some very divisive topics in the church regarding food, drinking and celebration of certain days. He talks about these topics, but brings it all around to the importance of unity and love.

*[ STORY: In my church in TN there was a huge issue brewing among the parents. The movie “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone", had just been released and we had some parents so upset that they were praying against the evils that it would potentially be perpetrating upon society, and we had other parents who actually like Harry Potter and took their kids to see it, including one of the Pastors!*

*It took a lot of prayer, patience, and lengthy meetings to come up with a peaceful resolve over this issue. They finally mostly agreed that it was not a ‘doctrinal dealbreaker’ or ‘core Christian’ issue, it was as Romans 14 calls a “disputable matter”.]*

**ROMANS 14**

**Romans 14:1 “**Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.”

Right away Paul tells us to accept the weaker brethren. He is not specific here about what are considered “Disputable Matters” versus what is considered non-disputable core doctrine. But he spends most of the chapter exhorting the church to not allow peripheral beliefs and practices to divide them. He lists some examples of food, drink, and observances, without ever telling us which is right and which is wrong, but usually points to the more legalistic and restrictive people as “*those whose faith is weak.”*

**14:2-4“**One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, *whose faith is weak*, eats only vegetables. **3**The 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. **4**Who 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.

The problem here is similar to the problems addressed in Galatians. There were those who were trying to live out a very pious and legalistic faith through very strict diets and observance. He tells the legalistic ones not to judge the others, and tells those who walk in more freedom not to “*treat the others with contempt”,* meaning don’t look down upon them, or disrespect them.

He reminds us that we are all servants of the Lord, He is in charge of us, we are not the judge of the Lord’s servants, we must trust the Lord to deal with them as He wills, just as He did with us.

**14:5-6 “**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.”

Within the Roman church, some were strict Sabbatarians, meaning that they could do very little to nothing on the Sabbath, while others were not so strict.

Some celebrated all the appointed feasts of the Lord, and were careful to adhere to the strict commands given for each one of them (Like Orthodox Jews and Seventh Day Adventists). Others were not quite as observant.

*[I had a Christian friend whose parents were good Christians but held to a very strict Sabbath and would not allow TV on Sundays. We were both baseball fans, so if he wanted to watch baseball on Sunday he had to come over my house to do it.]*

Some in the Roman church were strict vegetarians for various reasons and there was certainly the issue of *eating meat sacrificed to idols* that we see in 1st Corinthians 8.

The situation was than some of the meat sold at the market or served at homes, came from animals that had been sacrificed in pagan temples, but was still good meat. Some felt it was wrong to eat it, others didn’t seem to care.

*(Imagine if you found out that some of the prime rib, or filet mignon served at your favorite restaurant came from a rancher or butcher who was an idol worshipper? Would you still eat it?)*

Paul addresses this;

***1st Cor. 8: 4****“***4**So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. **5**There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. **6**But for us,

There is one God, the Father,
    by whom all things were created,
    and for whom we live.
And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ,
    through whom all things were created,
    and through whom we live.

**7**However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated. **8**It’s true that we can’t win God’s approval by what we eat. We don’t lose anything if we don’t eat it, and we don’t gain anything if we do.

**9**But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble.”

This is the important point. If we live for the Lord we will prioritize loving one another, just as he commanded us. If we love one another, we will look out for one another. Love means “*willing the highest good for another, without regard to self”.* Yes we have liberty to eat what we want, but how does this affect our brother or sister?

**14:7**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.

Paul does not take sides on this issue, instead he speaks to both sides of the debate. To the meat-eater, he says, *“be careful that you do not cause the weaker brother to stumble”*, to the non-meat-eater he says, “*don’t judge”.*

**14:13-16“**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. **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.

“…the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit!!!”

The kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven, is the situation where God is King, and we are subject to His dominion. If we are truly “kingdom living”, then we will have;

1. righteousness, 2. peace and 3. joy in the Holy Spirit!!!”
* Righteousness that comes from The Lord, imputed to us, not from ourselves.
* Peace that passes understanding and comes from the Prince of Peace.
* Joy, that goes beyond happiness and contentment. The joy of the Lord that is our strength.

I would argue that if anyone is operating *without* these Peace and Joy, they are probably not representing the Kingdom of God, even if they live the most pious, restrictive, and legalistic faith you’ve ever seen.

Paul tells the Ephesians;

**Eph. 4:3** “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Sometimes peace takes effort, humility and sacrifice. He tells the Roman church the same thing;

**14:19-21“**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.”

**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.” <>*

I eat Biblically Kosher, which means I adhere to the Kosher dietary laws of Leviticus 11, which basically means I don’t eat any pork or shellfish (including bacon, shrimp and lobster). When I was 10 years old, I visited my Jewish grandfather in Florida for the summer. He told me what Jewish people eat and don’t eat, and I decided I can do it for the whole summer. I got back to NJ and decided to keep it up until New Year’s. After that I decided to make it a life-long fast before the lord that I will eat completely Biblically Kosher (not necessarily Rabbinically Kosher, that’s a lot stricter and requires official Rabbinical approval).

I don’t do it out of any obligation, or compulsion. I don’t require my family to do it, although they basically do. and I certainly don’t look down on other people who do not eat Kosher (even Jewish people). I simply do it on my own volition before the Lord.

I don’t consider eating Kosher to be wrong or right, however if I was legalistic about it, and required others to do the same thing, THAT would be wrong.

Verse 8 said “*we belong to the Lord*”. We are all His, yet we are all different.

We all come from one heavenly Father, yet we are all different children of the Father.

My Mom and Dad had 12 Children, Aly’s parents had 7, so there are 19 siblings in our combined families but we are all different types of people.

Many in our families are strong Christians and are living out their faith according to the convictions they believe will please the Heavenly Father, but in some cases their Christian walk is very different than ours.

For instance;

* We celebrate all the Biblical feasts, no one else does.
* We don’t let our kids use apps like TikTok, and have lots of cellphone restrictions.
* We’ve Homeschooled them since 2nd grade.
* In many other areas we are very different than many other of our 18 siblings, even those who are Christians like us.

There are lots of things that we could do a lot better but fall short in some areas.

Some of you in this church have very different values for yourselves and your families than we do, that’s Ok.

Most of these topics are not central to our faith. They are not Salvation issues, nor are they even basic Biblical issues, they are *disputable matters*. We would be wrong to divide our families and even our church judging, defending, or litigating “disputable matters”, especially when the Bible clearly states; *“Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.”*

**Closing:**

The last sentence of the chapter is this:

**Romans 14:23b** “Everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

This is such an important verse because Faith is such an important topic. Faith and Trust are the same word (pistis). So in every area we are not trusting God, we are doubting God.

I believe that Faith is God’s love language. He desires us to have faith in Him more than anything. If we trust God, it means we have faith in God and just like Abraham, it is credited to us as righteousness.

If we doubt God, it is counted as unbelief.

God wants to provide for us in all that we need. He wants us to trust Him for everything. If we believe that, it means that we trust Him and have Faith in Him.

If we don’t believe that, and don’t trust Him in any area, we will try to attain things on our own, or do things in a manner that is not of faith.

That’s why “Everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

This includes, eating, drinking, observing special days and everything else.

What are areas that you doubt God? What are some things you do to satisfy, or indulge yourself instead of trusting God and submitting to His will, His word and His timing.

We all fall short in this area, we’ve all done things that did not come from faith, and is therefore sin. That’s why there’s forgiveness. That’s why Jesus offers us his cleansing.

He also offers us faith, so that we can truly trust in Him more, obey His will, and receive the blessings that come from obedience, as opposed to the consequences that come from doubt.

How do we receive more faith?

Just by doing what you’re doing; seeking God, spending time in His presence, and by hearing His word.

**Rom. 10:17** “Faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”