



Romans 14:1-12, Part 2

This week I ran into someone who used to attend our church and I had not seen him since he left. In my almost fifteen years at this church, only a small number of people have left because of a disagreement and a tiny portion of them left angry. Thankfully this man was not angry but he did have strong disagreements. He did not disagree with our church in particular but with the idea of churches in general.

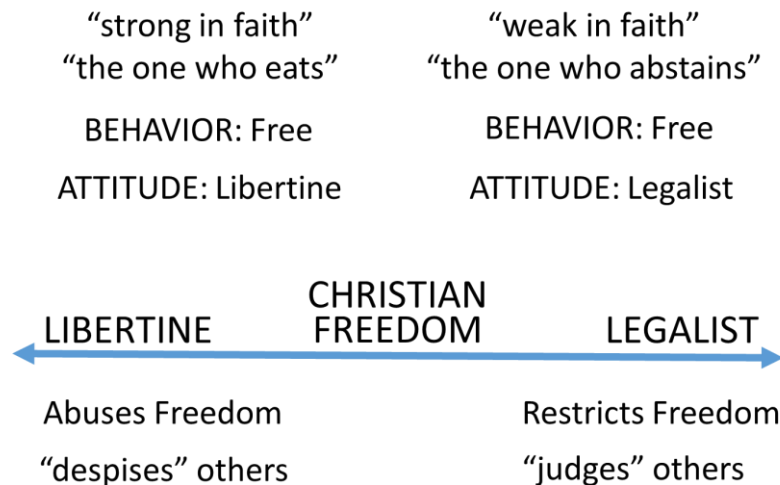
There were two things happening here. One, we had a strong disagreement with one another and two, it was a very friendly, peaceful conversation. He was convinced in his mind and I was convinced in my mind and neither of us would change our minds over a ten minute conversation while standing in Walmart. But the end result was that he felt that he had to part ways from us. And if the issue is important enough to you, that will occasionally happen. But the vast majority of the time we don't want to and should not part ways. So the challenge in our church is knowing how to hold strong, differing opinions but still live in full, loving unity with one another.

Several weeks ago we started looking at Romans 14 together which talks about this same issue. Paul was writing to believers in the church of Rome who had strong, differing beliefs but they did not handle these difference very well. They resorted to the childish pattern of name calling. They passed judgment on one another and they despised one another. Those are strong words which should never characterize a local body of believers. Since it's been several weeks, let's read this passage again.

*As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 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. 4 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.*

*5 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. 6 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. 7 For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 8 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. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. 10 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; 11 for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." 12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

Let me review the diagram I showed you in the first half of this message.



The believers who were "weak in faith" abstained from eating meat and drinking wine but the strong in faith felt that it was acceptable to partake of these things. Both "sides," if we can call them that, were free in their behavior and decisions. It was perfectly acceptable to eat meat and drink wine but it was not acceptable to despise fellow believers who chose not to partake. On the other hand, it was perfectly acceptable not to eat meat and drink wine but it was not acceptable to pass judgment on fellow believers who did choose to partake. So the strong had right behavior but sinful attitudes and the weak had right behavior but sinful attitudes. The result was that they were despising and passing judgment on each other. The unity of the body was being destroyed.

By far the easiest way to have full unity of belief is to force unity. Last week ISIS released a propaganda video with brainwashed children reciting their evil creed. Apparently they used children as young as 3 years old. The guns they were holding were almost as big as the children themselves. ISIS has complete unity because they force unity at the end of a sword or at gunpoint.

Some legalistic churches have so many rules and regulations and you need to follow all of them to be a part of their church. Such a church has lots of unity but it doesn't sound too appealing.

The challenge is to allow for diversity, within true Biblical standards, but also work toward full unity and love within the body. Paul's example in Roans 14 was not an issue of doctrine as much as it was of what we call Christian living. These were lifestyle issues. In the past two weeks, the Call Committee worked through 120 candidate profiles to narrow the list down to about 35. One of the candidates offered his opinion of some of these lifestyle issues and wrote this: "I do have a beer from time to time." We all got a chuckle out of that comment. It seemed odd that with something so important that he spoke of it so casually. Bu that is one issue that can cause division among believers.

Another are that is more relevant to our church is school choice. As you all know, we have a lot of young families at Grace and all of these kids done need to get edumacated. ;-) Our church is approximately one-third public school and 2/3 homeschool with the occasional Cornerstone child thrown in for good measure. This is an issue that runs deep with emotion and passion because we hold our children so dearly. Many of you have heard me say this before, but as a homeschooling family, one of the things that I really hate to see are the homeschoolers who say that it is a sin to send your kids to public school. Ray Moore is one of the most outspoken proponents of this idea. "If the evangelical community would step up and obey God in educating their own children, we could collapse the state model. We're feeding the monster by keeping our children there."<sup>i</sup>

He doesn't stop offending people there and proceeds to lay much blame on pastors. "I'm going to let you in on a dirty little secret of the evangelical pastors. I've been in the ministry for 40 years, and I can tell you this is true because they tell me this when we talk privately. They are afraid to tackle this because they have so many public school addicts in their churches. If they address it strongly, they'll lose their jobs. They'd rather hold onto their jobs, thinking they can do some good and win people to Christ, and not tackle the big gorilla in the room, which is public education. We think it's the responsibility of the churches to meet this need."<sup>ii</sup>

Here is a man who has strong opinions about homeschooling. I would probably agree with a lot of what he says because our family has made the decision to homeschool all 3 kids all the way through high school. You don't make that kind of commitment without having strong opinions on the subject. But having strong opinions and calling people who disagree with your opinions sinners are two very different things. It is not a sin to send your children to public school. In fact, I think it's a sin to say that it's a sin to send your children to public school.

I haven't heard this radical of thinking in our church body but that doesn't change the fact that parents have strong opinions. The ongoing challenge is to have strong opinions and make judgments for your own family without being judgmental. And make no mistake-both sides of this issue can be judgmental. Even if homeschoolers don't think it's a sin to send your children to public school, if you are not careful, you might make a comment that sounds like you are very close to that opinion. We can very easily come off sounding judgmental and so must be very careful.

But public school parents can have their own issues. To use Paul's language, these parents can find themselves quietly despising the homeschool families because they feel judged by them at times. They can develop their own sense of pride and stubbornness about their own lifestyle choices. At our former church, huge numbers of families homeschooled their children but no one homeschooled through high school. In fact, you were looked on with great suspicion if you homeschooled in high school. It really was a strange culture. We loved the people but many failed to see this strange discrepancy.

I will tell you what is a sin. It is a sin to judge and despise one another. Furthermore, it is a sin not to train and disciple your children. If your kids are in public school, you will have to be very involved in their schooling and maybe even involved at school, if possible. Public school parents have unique challenges just as homeschool parents have challenges. Some are the same challenges and some are different. I have seen public school parents fail in their job to disciple their children and I have seen homeschool parents do the same. It's not a sin to educate your children in a certain way but it is a grievous sin to fail to train them in godliness.

### **3. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.**

Paul hands us this principle in verse six. *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.*

If you recall, the arguments in the church were over observance of certain days and eating meat and drinking wine. These are issues related to combining Jewish and Gentile believers into one church body. It wasn't easy but neither is it easy to combine people with a wide variety of backgrounds into any church in our day.

Paul's point is that there was not one right answer for every Christian. *One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike.* And then the principle: *Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.* This is so true with something like school choice. You may feel absolutely passionate about your personal decision. You may be a homeschooling family and it is possible, that for you, it would be a sin to send your children to public school. But this principle tells us that though it may be a sin for you personally, that does not mean that it would be a sin for all believers. This is such an important distinction that cannot be missed.

This is how my conversation went in Walmart with the man who left our church. He was convinced in his own mind and that is what he needed to do. I affirmed that for him. I said, "I know you are convinced in your own mind and heart that this is the right thing for you, so you need to follow that. Now don't forget that I strongly disagree with him. I did agree with much of his thinking but I strongly disagree with his final decision. But I don't think he is in sin because of it.

So we have an issue like school choice and we have families in our church with varying opinions and lifestyles. Let me summarize some thoughts.

1. You should hold strong opinions. When it comes to your own children, it make sense that you approach the topic of school choice with passion and strong conviction. It would be strange if you did not have strong convictions.
2. Whatever you decide, you are not in sin. You have Christian freedom to make your own decision and live with your decisions.

3. Whatever you decide, you must be fully convinced in your own mind. If you doubt your decision, then maybe God is trying to pry you loose to move toward a different decision. And if you are not fully convinced in your own mind, then for you, your current decision might be sinful.
4. If you fail to disciple your children, then that is sin. So the core issue is discipling your own children, but you are free to decide how you do that as a family.
5. Once you have been fully convinced in your own mind about your personal decisions, you are not permitted to despise or pass judgment.
6. Each of us is given the responsibility of fighting for unity and love. Rather than looking for reasons to despise and condemn one another we ought to be laying aside our rights and looking to our responsibility of unity. We have a wonderful diversity of believers and families in our church. Diversity like this is not always easy to maintain. It takes work. Some of you are thinking, "But this issue doesn't impact me in the slightest." That's true, but everyone has points of disagreement. Everyone holds strong opinions about politics or some other way you raise your kids and run your family. The fact is that everyone thinks that what they are doing is right. Otherwise they would do it differently. So these principles apply to all of us. Unity is always worth fighting for.

Remember, we are talking about non-essential beliefs. This is not a discussion about core doctrine. There is no wiggle room on the deity of Christ. We will not budge on the Trinity, the necessity of faith in Christ alone for salvation or other core doctrines. A recent seminary grad emailed me this week and said he was interested in the job but saw that we required ordination with the EFCA. He said that he could not do that since he held to an amillennial position on the end times. But since the EFCA almost dropped premillennialism from our Statement of Faith in 2008, we consider the millennial position to be less essential than everything else in the statement of faith. So especially with lifestyle issues, the key is to determine which are essential and which are non-essential.

Such is the case with the homosexual issue. We have declared that Scripture unequivocally teaches that a non-celibate homosexual is unbiblical. But in all of our wrangling, we must say just as clearly that we accept all sinners in need of grace. Having homosexual temptation or tendencies is not itself sinful. Even in our small church, it is possible that at least one person fits into this category. We never want to be so outspoken on our position as to exclude those who are struggling. We say that to struggle is good. To give in and give up is the problem.

As Martin Luther famously said, I can't keep a bird from landing on my head but I can prevent him from building a nest. Let that word picture sink in for a minute. Every one of us have birds of temptation landing on our heads all the time. If we nurture our sin and allow it to have a comfortable home with us, then that is a huge problem. So if you are nurturing a particular sin this morning, think of yourself walking around with a giant bird's nest in your hair. I don't have much hair so mine would be perched neatly on the top of my noggin. Some ladies could virtually hide a small nest in the long hair, but the word picture is the same. Imagine if we could see the nest being built. Imagine if we could see the end result. Some of us would have nests with enough room for a family of eagles. If you don't hate your sin and give it back to God again and again, then nests in your hair are inevitable.

I would take Luther's analogy a step further and say that we can also prevent ourselves from living in a bird sanctuary. Sometimes we wonder why there are so many birds. Why does temptation seem to pursue us like a hungry lion? Well, that is the way Satan works, He really is a hungry lion. But if birds symbolize temptation, then why do you dwell in a bird sanctuary? Why do we place ourselves in places and circumstances that we know will tempt us? I'll tell you why. Because we *want* to be tempted. We are not content to stay away from the edge of temptation but we want to go right up to it and peer over the edge, not unlike [this video](#).

#### **4. Both sides honor the Lord.**

We all have disagreements with one another. We all takes sides, whether it's the school issue or something else. Paul is saying that both sides honor the Lord. *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.*

Your opponent, the one with whom you disagree is most likely seeking to honor the Lord in his or her decision. It's not always the case, but it's at least potentially true. But we get stuck thinking our way is always the right way and therefore the only way to honor the Lord.

Years ago when we first added drums to the worship teams, someone walked out of church as soon as the drums were being played. They believed that it was impossible to honor the Lord with a drum set. Now it is possible to dishonor the Lord with a drum set but it is also quite possible to bring him honor.

This gives the principle that all of life is to be submitted to the Word of God and to his honor. If you are a plumber, are you a Christian who is a plumber or are you a Christian plumber? The former does not see much association between his Christian faith and his career. But the latter integrates the full Christian worldview into his plumbing career. The way he treats his customers is thoroughly Christian. He doesn't cheat them on his time, adding an extra hour here or there. He shows up when he promised he would. He does the best plumbing work he can possibly do.

On the count of three, I want everyone to say their profession out loud. Even it's a homemaker or whatever it is. Ready? One, two three... Now at the count of three, I want you to add the word Christian before your profession. Like I am a Christian pastor. (At least, I'd better be!) Ready? One, two three...

Are you? Is that the way you approach your profession? It is thoroughly Christian? Your attitude, your decisions? Our goal should be to honor the Lord in even the smallest areas of our daily life.

#### **5. Only God can ultimately judge.**

Paul is quite pointed in what he wrote next.

*10 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; 11 for it is written,*

*"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."*

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

It's almost as if you can feel Paul staring at you as he asks, *Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother?* You know that viewpoint that you hold with such passion and commitment? One of the applications of these verses is the fact that you could be wrong. Don't worry so much about your opponent. Remember, we are not talking about clear issues of right and wrong. We are in the arena of Christian liberty. Don't worry so much about what the other guy is doing. He will give an account to himself to God.

And the fact remains that you could be wrong, or somewhat wrong in what you hold to. At yesterday's board meeting at Living Waters I just happened to notice what was written at the bottom of their statement of faith.

At Living Waters Bible Camp we recognize the no one individual or organization within the Christian faith has complete understanding of all the Truth.

I really like that statement. Now don't misunderstand this statement. They are not saying they think their statement of faith is wrong. That would be nonsensical. They are saying that they could be wrong about some of the finer points in the statement.

That is just simple humility, which is too seldom seen within the local church. Hold your beliefs with passion, but recognize that you could have it wrong. It will change the way you think about your so-called opponent and it will bring further unity to our church and glory to the Lord.

Rich Maurer  
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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.worldmag.com/2014/05/should\\_christians\\_remove\\_their\\_children\\_from\\_public\\_schools](http://www.worldmag.com/2014/05/should_christians_remove_their_children_from_public_schools)

<sup>ii</sup> Read more at <http://www.wnd.com/2014/05/claim-christians-sin-by-putting-kids-in-public-school/#y8s6IHTTFpYbpz1l.99>