

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Paul's Plea for Unity (Part 2)

Romans 14:13-23

Introduction: So last week we talked about how we need to “agree to disagree” on secondary matters in the church. And I gave you a list of about twelve different debatable matters that Christians sometimes disagree on. I mention movies, drinking, vaccines, birth-control, etc. Well after thinking about it some more this week, I’ve added some additional items to that list. So just in case you weren’t offended last week, maybe I can succeed at that this week.

Here are some additional items that Christians disagree on: 1) Tattoos. Should I get a tattoo, Pastor Tony? Yes or no? 2) Yoga. 3) Playing cards. I heard a story once about D.L. Moody (one of my heroes) that he found his buddies playing cards once before an evangelistic crusades, and Moody got so angry, he flipped their card-table over and rebuked them. Someone in this church asked me once to come play Euchre with him at his house. And I said, “No thank you!” And he said, “Why? Do you think it’s sinful?” And I said, “No, I don’t think it’s sinful. I just think it’s boring!”

Here are some other issues Christians disagree on: 4) Bible Versions (KJV, NIV, ESV, NASB). 5) Halloween, 6) Harry Potter, 7) Sabbath observance. Another one of my heroes, Eric Liddell, refused to run a race on Sunday, because he’s what’s called a “Sabbatarian,” like the Puritans that came before him.¹ I don’t share that view with Liddell. I would have run on Sunday. If I was good enough to make it to the NBA, I would have played games on Sunday without an ounce of guilt a prick in my conscience. But I still admire Liddell for his conviction and his consistency on that matter.

Here are some other issues Christians disagree on: 8) Gender pronouns, 9) Attending a homosexual wedding, 10) Christmas time and teaching your kids about Santa Clause, 11) Environmental conscientiousness—limiting your carbon footprint, 12) Social Justice issues, and 13) Debatable theological issues (e.g. the timing of the rapture, the Christian understanding of predestination).

And to complicate this matter further, not only do Christians disagree on these debatable nonessential issues, but sometimes Christians disagree on which issues are truly nonessential.² That’s why it’s good for a church to have its doctrinal issues clearly spelled out, so that parishioners understand those doctrinal matters that are considered truly essential.

And like I said last week, it’s good for a church to have a diversity of opinions on nonessential issues. That’s healthy.³ Unity among diversity (against uniformity) is beautiful. And it’s a blessing to have a church that has differences of opinion on some stuff.⁴ **It’s beautiful, but it’s not always easy. Sometimes it’s difficult to manage those differences of opinions and the passions that comes with that.**

And that’s why Paul wrote **Romans 14**. I’m so glad this chapter is in the Bible. It’s so illuminating for our lives. Paul is graciously teaching us how to live together and love one another when we have disagreements on certain things.

¹ See Jack Kuhatschek, *Romans: Becoming New in Christ*, LifeGuide Bible Studies (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 63. See also the comments by Grant R. Osborne, *Romans: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017), 454.

² As an example, the popular Bible teacher Beth Moore recently left the Southern Baptist Conference because she thought that Complementarianism had become an essential issue in that denomination. Whether or not that issue has become “essential” is debatable. It might be essential to the worshiping community, but it is not essential to salvation. For a further explanation see Al Mohler’s podcast “The Briefing,” 04-08-21, Part III: <https://albertmohler.com/2021/04/08/briefing-4-8-21>

³ John MacArthur, *Romans: Grace, Truth, and Redemption* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 93: “The diversity of the church displays Christ’s power to bring together dissimilar people in genuine unity. Yet Satan often works to create division and threaten that unity.”

⁴ Osborne, *Romans: Verse by Verse*, 447: “Paul reminds the Romans of what really matters to God, and it is not divisive issues like the food laws. I wonder if God will be saying something very much like this to us today: ‘You should not have wasted the church’s energy and time fighting over things like movies, which worship music God prefers, or even the rapture or predestination.’ They are definitely worth discussion and study papers, but they must never become ends in themselves or divide churches.”

And Paul's focus in Romans 14:13-23, our passage today, is on who he calls "the strong."⁵ He writes particularly in these verses to those who are strong in faith. Those who can eat meat with a clear conscience. Those who understand the Bible clearly and have a well-trained conscience concerning what they should do. And Paul says to the strong, "Listen up now, strong, you be gracious to those who are weak! You be patient with those who are weak! And don't be a stumbling block to the weak. Unity is more important than you're freedom to do whatever you want to do. Brotherly love in the church is more important than personal liberty. So prioritize that for the sake of the church!" That's the essential message of this passage today.

So let's unpack that this morning, Harvest Decatur. Here's the question I want to ask and answer:
How do we love others who disagree with us in the Body of Christ?

Four answers to that question. Four P's.⁶ Here's the first:

1. **Protect** one another from stumbling (14:13-15)

Paul says in verse 13,

¹³ *Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer,*

That's a great summary statement for verses 1-12! That's the essence of our passage from last week. Don't pass judgment on one another for a debatable, secondary issue.⁷ But now Paul's going to ask us to go further than that...⁸

but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Now remember the context here. Some people (mainly Jews) in the Roman church had tender consciences.⁹ They didn't want to eat meat. They were afraid that it might have been sacrificed to idols. They were so concerned about this that they essentially became vegetarians. Paul calls these believers "weak in faith" (14:1). He's not trying to insult them, he's just being clear with us that they are having a hard time coming to terms with how the NT revelation of Christ has changed regulation concerning meat. Christ declared all meat good to eat (Mark 7:19). God told Peter not to call "unclean" what he made clean (Acts 10:9-48).¹⁰ There's no reason that a NT Christian can't eat pork or shellfish or meat that may have been sacrificed to idols. **But if your brother or sister in Christ is struggling with that, don't put a stumbling block in front of them.**

Now "stumbling block" is a very descriptive term. I like it. Because I like the metaphor of walking with Christ. **We are walking with Christ as believers. We aren't walking in isolation; we are walking together. And the last thing that I want to do with my brother or sister in Christ is make their walk more difficult by setting up a booby-trap for them, so that they trip or fall. Or put a big rock in front of them, so that**

⁵ This is the position of Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 849 and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd Edition, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 703, as well as many others. Osborne, *Romans: Verse by Verse*, 442 is particularly hard on the strong: "They have become so smug in their superior position that they have wielded it as a weapon, and the absence of Christian love has made the truth a negative instrument threatening to destroy the faith of many of their weaker brothers and sisters." But I agree with Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 561. Paul's purpose is two-fold: "Both the strong believer and the weak believer need to grow. The strong believer needs to grow in love; the weak believer needs to grow in knowledge."

⁶ Taken and adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 273-274.

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 485 points out that the present tense of the verb for "pass judgment" (κρίνω), plus the use of the Greek μηκέτι, indicates that this was presently happening in the Roman church and Paul wants to put a stop to it.

⁸ There is brilliant wordplay here in the Greek as Paul uses the flexibility of the Greek κρίνω in both commands in verse 13: "Therefore let us not pass judgment (κρίνω) on one another any longer, but rather decide (κρίνω) never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother." See "κρίνω" in William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 567-9.

⁹ THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA is probably correct with his analysis of the situation in Rome: "Paul is saying this to the Gentiles, even if it appears that he is speaking to the Jews.... For the Gentiles at Rome were doing many things deliberately in order to upset the Jews, partly because they were the majority in the church and partly because they were of a higher social class." Quoted in Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 333.

¹⁰ There are theological implications here too. See Timothy Keller, *Romans 8-16 For You* (The Good Book Company, 2015), 153: "Now, in Christ, we are brought to God's presence holy and without blemish (Colossians 1:22). And therefore, to maintain a squeamishness about the use of any material thing is a failure to realize the full implications of the doctrines of creation and redemption."

their “walk with Christ” becomes “a fall on your face” with Christ. As a stronger Christian, I want to help them. I want to lead them to smooth pathways. I want to not personally be the one who trips them up or makes that walk more difficult.

And sometimes maybe I’m the weak brother in Christ! When that’s the case, I don’t want to be tripped up by someone else. So this is good instruction for us, so that we learn to live together and love each other.

And look what Paul concedes in **verse 14**.

¹⁴ *I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself,*

In other words all food is kosher.¹¹ Paul agrees with the strong over against the weak here.

but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵ *For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.*

Don’t grieve your brother.¹² Don’t damage your brother or distress him. Emphasize love instead.

By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

So let’s imagine two Christians in Rome who are both members of the church that Paul is addressing. There is a Gentile Christian named “Julius” and a Jewish Christian named “Solomon.” And Solomon goes over to Julius’s house for dinner, and Julius sets before Solomon a full rack of baby back ribs, right off the grill. And Solomon, because of his Jewish scruples, is mortified. He says, “How could you do this? How can you eat this? It’s unclean! And besides that, this meat undoubtedly has been through some pagan ceremony in the local temple before it came to market. So in eating this meat, we are participating in idol worship!” Julius, on the other hand, says, “Come on Solomon. That’s so old-school. We can eat whatever we want. Didn’t you hear what Jesus said? Didn’t you hear what God told Peter? Plus pork tastes delicious. Have you ever had ribs before?” So Solomon gets angry and leaves the table. The friendship and fellowship of these two believers is broken.

Now look what Paul is doing. Look what he says in **verse 14**.

¹⁴ *I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself,*

He’s saying, **“Julius is right. Julius is the strong believer. Nothing is unclean in itself, so you can eat baby back ribs if you want to. But if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. You’ve stumbled him. Emphasize love over eating whatever you want. Prioritize fellowship over food.”**

The Australian theologian, **Leon Morris**, said it this way in his commentary on **Romans**: **“For all its popularity among some Christians, judgment of others is an activity from which believers do well to abstain. Far more important than censuring a weaker brother for some overscrupulous action is it to make a firm resolve not to hinder such a weak brother in any way.”¹³**

And I love the final statement in **verse 15**.

By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

In other words, **“Don’t prioritize pork or food. Christ didn’t die for pork. And Christ didn’t die just so that you could eat pork. Christ died for your brother who maybe isn’t ready to eat pork. Prioritize him.”¹⁴ Grant Osborne says this about verse 15: “Jesus surrendered his life on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for this person’s salvation, and the strong have glibly brought them to spiritual ruin for the sake of exercising their Christian liberty and winning the debate.”¹⁵ Don’t do that, Christian.**

Let’s contemporize this. Christ died for your sister who thinks differently about social justice issues then you do. Don’t let that become a divisive thing in your relationship. Christ died for your

¹¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 460.

¹² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, vol. 38B, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1988), 820: “λυπεῖσθαι can have a stronger meaning than merely ‘be grieved.’ In nonbiblical Greek λυπέω can be used of cavalry or light troops harassing or annoying an army, and in the LXX it occurs quite often in the sense ‘angered’ (1 Sam 29:4; 2 Sam 13:21; 2 Kgs 13:19; Neh 5:6; Esth 1:12; 2:21; Jonah 4:1, 4, 9). So a stronger translation is needed to bring out the degree of hurt implied (‘distressed’ [NIV], ‘outraged’ [NEB])... What Paul has in view is not merely a passing sense of irritation or momentary pang of grief, but an actual wounding of conscience which destroys the whole balance of the brother’s faith.”

¹³ Morris, *Romans*, PNTC, 485.

¹⁴ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 257-258: “While freedom is a right, it is not a guide for conduct. Love serves that purpose. Rights are to be laid aside in the interest of love. That principle was firmly established by the incarnation (Phil 2:6–11).”

¹⁵ Osborne, *Romans: Verse by Verse*, 446.

brother who reads from a different Bible version than you. Don't let that become a divisive thing in your relationship. Christ died for that family that reads Harry Potter, and Christ died for that family that refuses to read Harry Potter. Christ died for that family that celebrates Halloween and that family that that refuses to celebrate Halloween. I honestly don't know who the weak one is and who the strong one in that scenario is. Does it really matter? Prioritize unity in matters of disagreement, and don't be a stumbling block to your brother or sister in Christ.

Write this down as #2. Paul wants us to protect one another from stumbling. He also wants us to...
2. **Prioritize** peace in the Kingdom of God (14:16-18)

Paul says in verse 16,

¹⁶ So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.

In other words, let sleeping dogs lie. Don't let a heated argument develop over something like meat. It's better to just not create a situation where lines have to be drawn in the sand.¹⁶

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved¹⁷ by men.

That is such a great statement right there, especially verse 17.¹⁸

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Paul is saying here, "Don't focus on externals; focus on eternals."¹⁹ And we all have friends who want to make Christianity all about externals. We all have friends that want to fight about secondary issues.²⁰ "What's your view on vaccines, Pastor Tony? What's your view on politics, Pastor Tony? What's your view on homeschool?" You can kind of feel that you are being set up for something when people ask you questions like that. "What's your view on this debated theological matter, Pastor Tony? Predestination? The rapture? Women in ministry? Eh?" You kind of get the sense they want to fight about that or maybe pigeonhole you into one of their categories.

That actually happened to me once. I went to this party to watch college basketball with some friends, and I got cornered and harangued by someone who was pressing me and pressing me for my view on end times and the antichrist. And for the most part I agreed with this person, but he was trying to make it a point of doctrinal credibility. And I wanted to tell him, "Look buddy, I just want to watch basketball. I don't want to start a fight about eschatology. And besides, I don't think this is something to be divisive over. Let's focus on righteousness. Let's focus on peace. Let's focus on joy in the Holy Spirit!"

I'm tempted, at this point, to talk about masks versus no masks. But I'm afraid that would just open up a Pandora's Box that I wouldn't be able to close this morning. I'm just going to defer to the statement that we sent out as elders.

But I'll tell you what I want. What I want is peace in the church. What I want is for all of us to focus on the kingdom of God and righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Because the kingdom of God is not a matter of [masks or no masks]... but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Here's a third way to love others who disagree with us in the body of Christ:

¹⁶ Hughes, *Romans*, 271: "The Kingdom of God is not operative in your life if your rights are so important to you that you are willing to separate from a brother who does not agree with you. The fact is, the man who feels he must demonstrate his emancipation on every possible occasion is a slave in spite of his apparent freedom, for the need to prove his liberty has become a tyranny."

¹⁷ CHRYSOSTOM: "Men will approve of such a person, not so much because of his perfect state but because of his devotion to peace and good relations." Quoted in Bray, *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS, 336.

¹⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The IVPBBCNT* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ro 14:15–16: "Precisely because foods do not matter, one should be willing to forgo eating them for the sake of what does matter: preserving the unity of the body of Christ. Paul is not telling Gentiles to keep kosher; but he is telling them not to try to talk Jewish Christians out of doing so." ORIGEN goes too far when he says, "Just as there is no marriage in heaven, so there is no eating and drinking there either. All that will be over and done with and will have no place there." Quoted in Bray, *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS, 335

¹⁹ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 561.

²⁰ Moo, *Romans*, NICOT, 860: "Paul is warning 'strong' believers that they can seriously damage the church—destroy its unity and sap its strength—through their attitudes and actions toward the 'weak.' And they cause this damage 'for the sake of food'—because they persist in behaving in a certain way in a matter that is peripheral, at best, to the kingdom of God."

3. **Pursue** the upbuilding of fellow believers (14:19-21)

Paul says in verse 19,

¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace

There's that word again—peace! God give us “peace” in our church!

¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

οἰκοδομή in Greek—“upbuilding” or “edification.” That is a great word, Harvest Decatur. The Greek οἰκία means “house.” We are building a house. We are mutually upbuilding one another like a house. And we are called to edify one another, not tear each other down. “Let us pursue what edifies,” says Paul.²¹ Versus this... look at verse 20.

²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God.

Focus on edification not demolition in the church of God.²² **Build one another up. Get your tool-belt on, get on over to you friend's house and help them secure their foundation, and tighten up their doorframes, and put in some storm windows. Don't take a sledgehammer over to their house and just start swinging.**

Everything is indeed clean,

There's that concession again. Paul agrees with the strong.

Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

Paul says elsewhere in **Galatians 5:13-14**, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” **In other words, don't flaunt your freedom if it empowers the flesh of your brother. Don't show off your liberty to the detriment of your brother.**²³

Martin Luther said wisely, “A Christian man is a most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”²⁴ That is the paradoxical reality of the servant of Christ Jesus. We are free! But that freedom leads to service, obedience and sacrifice for others. This is what we call “love.”

So back to my illustration with Julius and Solomon. What would've been better for Julius to do? Well, when he invites Solomon over for dinner, don't serve meat. Just serve vegetables. Don't even let it be an issue between the two of you. Can Julius eat meat when Solomon isn't coming over? Absolutely. He has freedom in Christ Jesus to do that.²⁵ **But don't flaunt that freedom. Don't use your freedom as an excuse to stumble your brother.**

And I think the instruction goes the other way too. If you are the weak brother, don't force your tender conscience on everybody else. Don't assume that everyone has to abide by the same “gray-area” standards that you abide by. That's not loving your brother. And if the issue comes up in conversation... if there's enough trust built up between people that disagree to discuss the matter, discuss it without passing judgment or despising one another. Be willing to disagree without feeling forced to divide.

²¹ ORIGEN: “Eating meat and drinking wine are matters of indifference in themselves. Even wicked people may abstain from these things, and some idol worshipers in fact do so, for reasons which are actually evil. Likewise quite a few heretics enjoin similar practices. The only reason abstinence of this kind is good is that it may help to avoid offending a brother.” Quoted in Bray, *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS, 337–338.

²² Keller, *Romans 8-16 For You*, 154-5: “Some have thought this means that the weak brother might be totally ruined and go to hell, but that is very unlikely. Most of Romans 8 was about how nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Are we to believe that the insensitivity of the strong toward the weak is really enough to send a Christian to hell? So we cannot conclude that the strong have the power to destroy someone's Christianity... [but] the strong can slow or thwart the maturing of the weak into Christ-like wisdom and character.”

²³ Moo, *Romans*, NICOT, 862: “Paul's point, then, is that the ‘strong’ should be content with the blessing God has given them in enabling them to understand the liberty that their faith provides them, without feeling it necessary to flaunt that liberty before their ‘weaker’ fellow believers.”

²⁴ Quoted in Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 469.

²⁵ Morris, *Romans*, PNTC, 491: “There is nothing wrong with the eating and drinking as such. They are to be avoided when they cause offence but not necessarily at other times.” Keller, *Romans 8-16 For You*, 157 is right to warn us that, “We must be careful here. ‘Stumble’ and ‘fall’ mean more than just bothering the weaker brother. A grumpy Christian could blackmail a whole church in that case. Some churches have Christians who are very weak and have an enormous number of scruples. They are constantly getting irritated and upset by other church members who are offending their standards of proper Christian behavior. The strong do not have to refrain from doing everything that upsets anyone else. But if the weak have a very deep and settled conviction—if they are ‘convinced’—and if they are clearly being tempted to bitterness or spiritual confusion, then the strong should refrain out of love.”

I had a friend several years ago who disagreed with me about the Holy Spirit's work in a person's life. It was actually kind of an abstruse matter. I told him that I didn't think the Holy Spirit would prompt people to do something that the Bible didn't expressly command. He disagreed, and thought that the Holy Spirit's promptings were to be obeyed and prioritized at all costs. I said, "Okay, well let's just agree to disagree on this matter." And he said, "No, I refuse to agree to disagree. You're wrong on this matter." I was like, "Ok. I guess this issue is more important to him than peace." Actually it wasn't the issue, it was control. He wanted to control me and what I believed, and when I wouldn't allow that, he just blew up our relationship. And I noticed about this guy, that all of his relationship with other Christians were like that. They were all extremely explosive. Everywhere he went, it was like TNT followed him. He wasn't interested in building up other believers. He loved friction. He craved conflict. He liked controlling people and conforming people to his image.

And you know what, I'll be honest, there's a part of me that is like that too. I like to argue. I do. And more than just argue, I like to win arguments! I'm competitive. And sometimes I have prioritized winning over upbuilding. I have prioritized being right over being loving. And I want to do better with that. In fact, the older I get, the less I care about being right with secondary issues. (As far as primary issues go, I'll die on a hill first before I back down from those matters.) But with secondary issues, I care more about people. I care more about building up other people. I care more about peace and unity and brotherly love in the church.

Some of you might know that C.S. Spurgeon, the famous pastor from London in the 19th Century, was very fond of his cigars. And many people considered that a questionable practice, even in Spurgeon's day. And he told someone once that he smoked cigars, but not to "excess." And when that person asked him what excess looks like for a cigar-smoker, Spurgeon said, "smoking two cigars at the same time."²⁶ That's excessive!

Well that story is famous about Spurgeon. But you might not know that Spurgeon actually stopped smoking cigars later in life. Once when he was walking around London, he saw an advertisement for a store that said, "We sell the cigar that Charles Spurgeon smokes." And he realized that his notoriety as a famous pastor was being used to sell cigars. And so, Spurgeon gave up the habit. He came to see that his freedom to smoke cigars might be causing others to stumble.²⁷ **And I'll just say that that's a sign of maturity when someone cares more about their brother or sister in Christ than they do about their own personal liberty and autonomy. That's maturity when you pursue the upbuilding of fellow believers!**

And here's how Paul closes this passage. Write this down as #4 in your notes.

4. **Preserve** a clear conscience (14:22-23)

Paul says in verse 22.

²² The faith²⁸ that you have, keep between yourself and God.²⁹ Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

That is a fascinating statement right there.

Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

If your conscience is afflicted by drinking beer, don't drink beer. It's better to protect your conscience, even if it's overactive than to enjoy a beer or get a tattoo or take a medication or eat food sacrificed to idols.

²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

²⁶ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 560.

²⁷ Hughes, *Romans*, 273.

²⁸ JOHN CALVIN: "Here the word *faith* stands for a fixed conviction of the mind and, so to speak, a firm assurance—not just any kind, but what has been derived from God's truth. And so anxiety or uncertainty damages all our actions, however beautiful they may otherwise be." Quoted in Philip D. W. Krey et al., eds., *Romans 9–16: New Testament*, vol. VIII, RCS (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 204.

²⁹ TILEMANN HESSHUS is correct with his interpretation: "Why then does Paul say in this passage, 'Keep faith to yourself'? Paul is not discussing here doctrine or the articles of faith, nor is he discussing a situation in which our confession is demanded of us, but about indifferent matters and the use of one's freedom among weak Christians." Quoted in Krey et al., eds., *Romans 9–16*, RCS, 202.

Now this is tricky.³⁰ What Paul is saying here is that doubts will get you into trouble. Doing doubtful things that afflict your conscience is sinful. We should live lives of confidence and faith. We should be clear about what is right and what is wrong, and if we are unsure, we should abstain in order to preserve a clear conscience.

I was watching an interview this last week that Al Mohler did with a former CIA agent.³¹ And they were talking about the morally compromising issues that come up with serving the government in the CIA. And the guy who Mohler was interviewing, his name is James Olson, was talking about how you have to lie and deceive as a spy in order to get information that will save lives. And he gave several examples of this. And he talked about some other “gray areas” of espionage too. And he was absolutely convinced in his own mind that these measures were good, because they were necessary in order to serve his country and save lives during the Communist uprisings in the Cold War and the threat of terrorism in the 21st Century.

And I was absolutely fascinated by this interview. He even explained how he teaches these things to intelligence officers by referencing the spies in the OT and Rahab who lied to protect them (Josh 2:1-24). I was fascinated, and I was intrigued by this discussion. But I knew in listening to this guy talk, that I could never, ever be a spy or an intelligence officer for the U.S. Government. I just don’t think my conscience could handle it. I guess I’m just too much of a Puritan at heart. That, to me, is a “meat sacrificed to idols” issue. And maybe I’m too much of the weak brother... I don’t know.

I had this doctor once in Chicago who told me that I was stressed out and I needed to take up Yoga in order to relieve my stress. This really happened to me. And I told him, “I’m sorry, I just can’t do that with a clear conscience. I just can’t wear Yoga pants. I’m sorry!” Maybe I’m the weak brother in that scenario... I don’t know. But I want to preserve my conscience. And I think this verse, verse 23, is relevant to that situation:

²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats,

Maybe you don’t have doubts doing Yoga or working for the CIA. If you work for the CIA, by the way, don’t tell me! I don’t want to know. But if you do have doubts... don’t do it. And if you do it, don’t look down on your weaker brother, me, because I can’t do it.

²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

I said a few things about conscience last week, and I want to repeat them now. Your conscience is a good thing. It’s a good thing. You should try to protect it as best you can. The etymology of that word is instructive: “con-science.” “Con” means “with” in Latin, and “science” means “knowledge.” So conscience is a kind of secondary knowledge or discernment that can help you in your life.³² **And look out for the person who doesn’t have a conscience. That’s a dangerous person.**

But sometimes we do have overactive consciences. Think of the Mormon who can’t drink caffeine, because it was forbidden in his childhood. Think of that story I told you last week about the new Christians who didn’t want to go bowling with my pastor, because “bowling” was an excuse for sexual immorality. Sometimes our consciences need to be trained and brought into submission to what the Bible actually says.³³ And maybe one of you someday can convince me that Yoga is perfectly copacetic for a

³⁰ Mounce, *Romans*, NAC, 256 offers a helpful warning here: “We must be careful not to generalize on the principle expressed in this teaching. Paul was not saying that sin is a matter of personal opinion. He was not teaching that as long as we think something is okay it is okay for us. Scripture clearly teaches that certain things are wrong. There are, however, other matters about which there may be legitimate differences of opinion. They are secondary issues about which Christians may be of differing persuasions. In such cases ‘strong’ believers are to be willing, as an expression of Christian love, to allow the sensitivities of the ‘weak’ to condition how they live.”

³¹ See the Thinking In Public interview, “Spycraft and Soulcraft on the Front Lines of History: A Conversation with Former CIA Chief of Counterintelligence James Olson,” 04-28-2021: <https://albertmohler.com/2021/04/28/james-olson>

³² Taken from J.D. Greear’s message, “Unity > Uniformity,” 01-05-21: <https://vimeo.com/382943403>

³³ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 561: “An illustration from the home might help us better understand what is involved. When a child comes into a home, everything has to change. Mother and Father are careful not to leave the scissors on the chair or anything dangerous within reach. But as the child matures, it is possible for the parents to adjust the rules of the house and deal with him in a more adult fashion. It is natural for a child to stumble when he is learning to walk. But if an adult constantly stumbles, we know something is wrong. Young Christians need the kind of fellowship that will protect them and encourage them to grow. But we

Christian. I'm willing to have that conversation. I'm willing even to take on the title of "the weaker brother." But until my conscience releases me, I can't do it. I can't do it in good faith. And Paul says here, "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." Not unforgiveable sin. But sin nonetheless. **So let's be kind to each other and each other's consciences in these matters.**

Tim Keller tells a story about a girl he knew who wasn't allowed to wear make-up to school. I think this story is really instructive for us. Keller says this, "I once knew a high-school girl from a strict church background that taught it was sinful for women to wear makeup. But the peer pressure at school (from other Christian girls raised in other churches) led her to begin putting on makeup after leaving home in the morning (and wiping it off before coming home). Now, though the Bible nowhere forbids makeup, the girl was violating her conscience as she did this. She was not 'convinced.' Spiritually within herself, she was choosing popularity over faithfulness to God. As a result, she soon found herself much more open to real violations of God's will in the area of sexuality. She had 'stumbled' because her Christian friends had mocked her principles, misguided though they were."³⁴

Now wouldn't it have been better for those girls to love their sister in Christ despite their differences of opinion on this issue? Wouldn't it have been loving of them maybe to even refrain from wearing makeup as an act of solidarity with their sister-in-Christ? I don't know. I think that would have been better than what took place, belittling her for being different from them.

And to that you might say, "No, no, no, Pastor Tony. I'm not my brother's keeper. I'm not my sister's keeper. That's what the Bible says." Yeah, that's actually what Cain sinfully said about Abel after he murdered him. That's not exactly presented to us in the Bible as a way to live. Aren't we called to be our brother's keeper? Aren't we? Aren't we call to build up and protect and love one another in the body of Christ?

You know Rich Mullins has this song called "Brother's Keeper." And he sang:

*My friends ain't the way I wish they were
They are just the way they are
And I will be my brother's keeper
Not the one who judges him
I won't despise him for his weakness
I won't regard him for his strength
I won't take away his freedom
I will help him learn to stand
And I will, I will be my brother's keeper.*

You know I called this message today, "Paul's Plea for Unity (Part 2)." It's kind of a sequel to last week's message. But I kind of think it'd be better titled "Be your brother's keeper." Watch out for your brothers in Christ and your sisters in Christ. Don't put a stumbling block in front of them. Don't judge them. Love them. Build them up. **Let's do that as a church, Harvest Decatur.**

cannot treat them like 'babies' all their lives! The older Christians must exercise love and patience and be careful not to cause them to stumble."

³⁴ Keller, *Romans 8-16 For You*, 155.