

Message #50

Romans 14:13-23

One of the big problems that have existed among the people of God is criticism and judgment based on gray areas. When it comes to Grace Age Christianity, there are many things classified as evil and sinful from which we want to avoid. We are to make no provision for our flesh.

There are sinful things named in Scripture that we don't want in our lives. Such things as sexual immorality, idolatry and greed, envy and jealousy, occult and drunkenness are sinful. Those things are not gray; these things are evil and sinful and they should never be in the life of any believer.

I read of a Pastor who had a person in his congregation who had a drinking problem. One Thursday he ran into the man and said I was happy to see you at prayer meeting last night. The parishioner said, "So that's where I was last night; thanks for telling me."

God's people need to be working on their own lives to make sure they are staying away from things God says are evil and sinful.

But there are other things the Bible does not classify as sinful. For example, some people like to listen to country western music. Some people like to listen to pop music. Some people like to listen to classical music. Some people like to go to the opera and some people like to go see a play. Some people like to go to a professional sporting event and some people like to go to a concert. Some people like to go to or rent a movie. Some men like to have a moustache or beard and some don't want that. Some women like to dye their hair and some don't. Some women like to put on some makeup and some don't. Some people like to have a glass of wine and some don't. So who is right and who is wrong? What Bible verse do you turn to in order to resolve this?

The fact is every believer has a right before God to decide his/her own position on gray area issues. Every one of us will face God and give an account of ourselves so each one of us needs to be learning and developing and working on our own lives. **What we do not want to do is waste our time judging each other on gray areas.**

What Paul says here is this:

BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT JUDGE EACH OTHER OVER GRAY AREA ISSUES, BUT IMPLEMENT SOUND BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES IN THEIR OWN LIVES AND SEE THAT THEY DO NOT OFFEND OTHERS.

We do have liberty and freedom in Jesus Christ, but we don't want to use our liberty or freedom in such a way that we harm another brother or sister. We want to be careful how we live our lives.

Now before we get into this, I want to say that growing in the Lord and growing in truth is a life-long process. When I got saved, I was in a rigid legalistic church and as a result I formed rigid legalistic convictions about many things. I was a weak believer who thought he was strong. But as I crawled through the Bible and started coming to terms with truth, my conclusions and convictions matured.

A key turning point for me was in school we were taught verse by verse and paragraph by paragraph the book of Galatians. That book started a convicting process for me to see myself for what I really was. It brought me to a crossroads—do I grow in grace or stay in my religious rut.

That is the way it is supposed to work. You are here today and you have certain convictions and you have a right to have those convictions. We are not trying to talk you out of them. However, we all need what is in this passage and over time you may discover some of your convictions will mature and change.

In this passage, Paul lays out ten gray area Grace Age guiding principles to live by:

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #1 – We must not do things that could cause another believer to stumble. **14:13**

Paul was a strong believer and he includes himself in this point by using the pronoun “us.” What he says is we who are strong must not do something that could cause a weaker brother to stumble. We don’t want to do something in a gray area context that could stifle the growth or cause a believer to trip up and stumble and not grow.

Now the mature believer has to make a judgment as to whether or not he is in the presence of an immature believer who could be hurt or some believer who is a legalistic Pharisee. For example, when the Apostle Peter was eating with Gentiles and saw the Jews walk in, he stopped eating with the Gentiles and Paul got in his face (Gal. 2:11-14). When Jesus was in the field on the Sabbath day and the Pharisees had their rules about that, He did it right in front of them (Matt. 12:1-2). He did the same thing with healing on the Sabbath (Matt.12:9-13).

But let’s say you think it is okay to have a glass of wine, which Paul brings up in this context (**v. 21**) and you are with someone who had a drinking problem. If you opted to use your liberty and had a glass of wine in front of him, it could potentially hurt him because he struggles with that.

We don’t want to use our gray area convictions to cause someone else to stumble. We need to be careful with that.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #2 – We must know that believers think differently about gray areas. **14:14**

This book of Romans had made it very clear that spirituality is a matter of the mind and our thinking. This is why believers are challenged in many passages to develop “sound minds.” Paul says the gray area is not the problem; the problem is what the individual thinks in his mind about the gray area. People think differently about gray area issues. Some people look at a gray area and have no problem with it, but another person looks at the same gray area and has a problem with it.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #3 – We must know that weak believers may be destroyed over gray areas. **14:15**

Gray areas can destroy people. The word “destroyed” is a strong Greek word that means it is possible to totally destroy and utterly kill the spiritual life over some gray area (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 52).

There is no question that it is possible to wreck someone else’s faith over gray areas. Again we may use the illustration Paul uses here in drinking wine. Someone could drink wine and have no problem with it, but if one were with an alcoholic who just came to Christ and you drank wine, it could cause him to stumble and go right back to drinking alcohol.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #4 – We must know that our liberty may potentially be spoken of as being evil by some. **14:16**

Mr. Miles told me years ago, be very careful about traveling with people from your congregation because if they see something and don’t keep their mouth shut, they can do great damage to you and your ministry. Very few people have the integrity to keep their mouth shut.

If you are a strong believer and realize the freedom that you have in Christ in a gray area and you are with a weaker believer who doesn’t see it that way, he could shoot off his mouth and make it out to be evil.

Harold Kregel told me a story that happened when he was in Spain. A missionary was in Spain and being supported by several fundamental churches from a particular denomination that was known to be legalistic. Well this missionary had been praying about a family to come to Christ for a long time and one day the wife was in the grocery store and she invited her and her husband to come to their home for dinner. When they drove into the driveway, they drove through acres and acres of grapes. When they sat down for dinner, the host said I want to share the best wine that has ever come from our vineyard and he poured each a glass of wine. They ate the meal and shared Jesus Christ with this family. Well weeks later there was a meeting of the mission organization and this missionary was excited that God had opened this door and he told this story of what happened. Well a legalistic goof reported it back to the supporting churches that this missionary was drinking and by the time the story was embellished they were telling people they had drunks on the mission field.

It was a mess. The mission agency sent a key person to Spain to find out the facts and eventually it was all resolved. But one guy caused the problem by shooting off his mouth.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #5 – We must realize that God’s kingdom is not about our gray areas, but about the Holy Spirit producing a righteousness that builds up the family of God. **14:17-19**

The one who is most pleasing to God is not one fighting about gray issues, but one developing in his relationship with the Holy Spirit and growing in true Biblical righteousness and blossoming into bearing more fruit and building up the body.

This is so informative because the one who is always fighting over gray areas thinks he is a strong champion warrior for God. Fact is, he is just the opposite. One who is a champion for God is one who is developing in the joy of the Holy Spirit and the peace of God. Gray area fighters are not joyful and not peaceful because they are always in war over their convictions.

Verse 18 is eye opening. The one who is acceptable and pleasing to God and the one who will have a real impact on people is not the gray area fighter; it is the one who is developing in the Spirit of God and truth of God. That one will have the approval of God and will make a positive impact on others.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #6 – We must realize that not all consciences are the same on gray issues. **14:20**

Our conscience is that inner part of us that analyzes our behavior in view of our beliefs. When you do something or say something, your conscience will either judge it as good and clean or bad and dirty.

This message here is so clear. There is nothing wrong with the gray area; it is how one views the gray area that is the issue. Not all consciences have the same view on it.

Eating meat that had been sacrificed to an idol meant nothing to certain believers. But weak Christians really struggled with that.

If your conscience permits you to do something or enjoy something in a gray area, then do it. If your conscience condemns you, then don’t do it.

Every believer must live life in the context of his or her own conscience. There are certain things that may be wrong for me but not wrong for you. There are certain things that may be wrong for you that are not wrong for me.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #7 – We must realize that abstinence from a gray area may be necessary in front of a weaker brother. **14:21**

If we have a weaker brother who may stumble around us who really has a problem in a certain area, the strong believer needs to refrain. There are two gray area issues specifically mentioned in this verse:

- 1) The issue of eating meat.
- 2) The issue of drinking wine.

If one is around a weaker believer and does not see anything wrong, one must refrain if it will hurt the weaker believer.

Now again, the issue here is the weaker believer, not the Pharisaical legalist. When we were in DeMotte, there was a very legalistic family in our church who promoted the idea that it was not spiritual to eat pork. They were the judge and jury by their own rigid code. Well we had fellowship dinners in our homes and the host would serve the meat and the drinks and the others would bring a dish to pass and this family was in our group. So Mary said what shall I make for meat and I said make ham. The night of our dinner they came to our home and Mary had made ham and had it on the table with it covered. So after we prayed for the food, we took the cover off the meat and started passing the ham. They were squirming, you could see it. My thinking was it's time for you to grow up. You can eat ham or not eat ham, but that is what we are serving.

Now had this been a weak believer who, perhaps was of a Jewish background, who had just come to faith in Christ, we would not have served that. But they weren't and we did.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #8 – We must realize that our own conviction on gray areas is a private conviction. **14:22a**

Believers need to realize that they do have liberty in Christ when it comes to gray areas. We are not to parade our liberty before others; we are to keep it between ourselves and God.

We need to keep our mouth shut on some of our own convictions. If questioned, say you need to form your own convictions before God.

Each of us will stand before God to be judged.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #9 – We must realize that we have a right to be happy in our gray area choices. **14:22b**

Believers have a right to enjoy life. They have liberty to be happy. God gives us many good things to enjoy in life. A legalist is one who lives in constant fear that some believer somewhere is having fun and enjoying life. That is what makes him miserable knowing that.

Augustine said, “Love God and do what you like” as long as it is not sinful or hurtful to you or another brother.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #10 – We must know that a violation of conscience in gray areas is sin. **14:23**

If our conscience bothers us, we should not do it. If you participate in something your conscience will not permit, it is sin for you.

Now over time your perspective may change about some gray area. That is what growth does. Something you may think is sinful that is not sinful, to you may be sinful if you think it is. If you doubt that you have freedom to do something or enjoy something, then don't do it. But don't judge people who don't see it the same way.

We do have wonderful freedom in Jesus Christ and we should not ever

What Paul was after was a group of believers who cared about God and each other. He did not want believers wasting their time judging each other on gray areas. He promoted Christian liberty, but he also promoted the wise use of that liberty.

If you want the best life you can ever have, come to Christ. He will set you free.