

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #49

Romans 14:1-9

When it comes to gray areas, we are not talking about things the Bible classifies as sinful. We are talking about things which are morally indifferent; that is, they are not classified as either right or wrong in Scripture.

Back in Paul's day, there were generally three main gray areas:

1. The gray area of diets - eating meat versus becoming a vegetarian. **14:2**
2. The gray area of days - observe special days or not observe special days. **14:5**
3. The gray area of drinking - drinking wine versus not drinking wine. **14:21**

The contextual reason for the need of this discussion is what he said in Romans 13:14, "Make no provision for the flesh." One believer could take this mandate and begin judging another believer on areas which are indifferent. Paul was facing a group of people who had started to argue about gray areas; he had one central message:

THE BELIEVER HAS NO RIGHT TO JUDGE ANOTHER BELIEVER CONCERNING GRAY AREA ISSUES.

This does not mean that parents cannot set rules and expect their children to honor them as long as they are in their home. This does not mean that an employer cannot set rules for the work place and expect employees to honor them. This does not mean that an educational institution cannot set rules and expect their students to honor them. What this means is that we have no right to judge another person's spirituality on gray areas.

If we are asked our opinion, we certainly have a right to give it. We also certainly have a right to govern our life and home by our own convictions, but we do not have a right to use our convictions as a basis for judging others on gray issues.

In this text, Paul sets forth three main reasons why we have no right to judge others:

REASON #1 – Do not judge others because of God's command. **14:1-3a**

The verbs "accept" (**14:1**), "regard with contempt" (**14:3**), and "judge" (**14:3**) are all imperatives. What this means is that all are commands of God. **We have been commanded by God not to judge one another concerning gray issues.** So this becomes a matter of our obedience.

It would be wise for us to take a moment to Biblically define weak and strong Christians from God's perspective, which is totally different than from man's perspective.

The weak Christian from God's perspective is one with the scruples. The weak Christian is one who believes that by not eating meat he is more spiritual (14:2). The weak Christian is one who thinks that because he is a vegetarian he is more right with God. However, Paul is very careful to point out that this person is weak "in faith."

In Greek the text says weak “in the faith” meaning weak in the doctrine of the faith system of salvation. This believer doesn’t know how the faith system works.

The strong Christian from God’s perspective is one without the scruples. He doesn’t seem to have the high standards or rules. He is one who believes he can eat anything. **He is one who realizes he has perfect liberty to enjoy meat and enjoy life and this has nothing to do with his spirituality.** Basically, he has no scruples or convictions about these gray areas.

William R. Newell makes an interesting observation when he remarks that in most churches the weak Christian will be more readily accepted and deemed as really spiritual quicker than one who is actually strong and well-grounded in theology.

Both the strong and mature believer and the weak and immature believer face various dangers:

Danger #1 - The dangers for the strong and mature believers.

1) The Verbal Danger - The danger of bad arguments. 14:1

The mature believer has a tendency to get into argumentative debates that can destroy the weaker brother or sister. The words “passing judgment on his opinions” literally refer to judgmental questioning or reasoning.

2) The Mental Danger - The danger of bad attitudes. 14:3

The word “contempt” is one that means to look down on or consider as nothing. The mature believer has a tendency to consider the weaker brother as an insignificant nothing who doesn’t know what he is talking about. It is true that in many ways the immature believer doesn’t know what he is talking about; however, the mature believer must not develop a bad attitude toward that brother which holds him in contempt.

Danger #2 - The danger for the weak and immature believers.

There is one main danger for the immature believer and that is the danger of judgment.

The immature believer has a tendency to judge the mature believer. The immature believer sets himself up as judge and jury against the strong believer. If he learned of something that the mature believer was doing and he didn’t like it or it didn’t meet his scruples, he would judge him.

Both dangers are wrong! Both dangers are real! Both need to be stopped!

REASON #2 – Do not judge others because of God’s property. 14:3b-4

When we make a judgment on someone else over gray areas, we are making a judgment over something that belongs to God. There are two facts that Paul spells out about God’s property:

Fact #1 - God has accepted the believer. **14:3b**

The verb “accepted” indicates God brought the person to Himself. God took this particular person and pulled him to Himself and saved Him. God has fully accepted him if He saved him.

Fact #2 - God owns the believer. **14:4**

This is a wonderful verse for all of us because it tells us that if we have believed on Jesus Christ, God will make us stand. God causes us to stand as His child forever. The imagery here is that the believer is the property of God.

What right do we have to judge another on gray areas? Who is it that owns the believer? Who paid the price for the believer? Who is the master of the believer? All believers belong to God.

REASON #3 – Do not judge others because of individual responsibility. **14:5-9**

These are extremely important verses. First of all, they teach us that there are various degrees of growth, of knowledge, and maturity. **These verses also teach us that when it comes to gray areas, there is room for flexibility in thinking.**

Now the particular problem that entered here was one of days.

Point #1 - Each individual is to think in terms of his own conscience. **14:5**

The principle is this - if we cannot do it in a good conscience, then we should not do it at all. We must each have our own thinking on the subject. Each believer must be fully satisfied and persuaded in his own mind (*Greek Lexicon*, p. 365).

Point #2 - Each individual is to think in terms of God. **14:6**

Do you know that it is possible for a man to be doing exactly the opposite of what we are doing in a gray area and be doing it unto the Lord? It is possible for two believers to be thinking totally opposite on a gray area issue and both be doing the opposite thing for the Lord.

Each of us must always keep in our minds that our doing something or not doing something is being evaluated by God.

Point #3 - Each individual is to think in terms of eternity. **14:7-9**

Each person is accountable to God and each person will face God. **There is a very encouraging word in verse 8 which verifies the doctrine of eternal security.** What is said is that gray areas have nothing to do with salvation for if you live or die you belong to the Lord.

Truth is, it is much easier to judge others than ourselves, but it is spiritual to judge ourselves and not others when it comes to gray areas.