

Drive in 21st June – Father's Day
Be Gracious – Romans 14

Can I be your pastor today? Will you let me guide you into a different frame of mind this morning? Will you let me graciously correct some wrong thinking with some very clear Biblical instruction as it relates to our current crisis?

I promise you, that if you will let me do that this morning, it will help you find both internal peace and peace in your interpersonal relationships!

Let me present to you this morning **two Diametrically opposed thoughts** I have been hearing these days! And they are creating great divisiveness.

1: By not quarantining, by not social distancing, by not wearing masks and gloves - we are not being safe, we are putting everybody else at risk. And to abandon these safeguards too soon is not keeping the welfare of others in mind. As Christians we need to be concerned for our fellow man.

2: For the sick, the elderly, the susceptible and immune compromised, quarantining, social distancing, wearing masks and gloves is important and necessary. But for the healthy rest of us, we're weakening our immune systems and creating a greater risk to the public. God gave us incredible immune systems for this very purpose. Much of the pandemic hype is being influenced by money and politics. As Christians we need to heed the Bible's directives and assemble – trust God - not fear!

Honestly, our current crisis has brought out both the best and the worst in us as people. I have seen extremely selfless acts of love between people and I have seen extremely selfish acts of contempt between people.

And though I am not surprised at either of these two behaviors – I am greatly saddened by the fact that Christians are guilty of the worst of these behaviors; showing contempt for both non-Christians and fellow Christians regardless of what side of the fence they are on. I've been "*simply advised*" from both sides.

I'm saddened, disappointed, and maybe even a bit appalled by the **contempt** I see people dishing out at one another. Both sides consider themselves smarter and more informed than the other side. **Listen**, even the experts disagree, and we aren't the experts! So, could you be wrong – absolutely!

Now you might be asking yourself, which position is yours Mark?

Well, I've listened to experts on both sides of the matter – I've listened to health officials, doctors, scientists, politicians, community leaders, pastors, church members and most importantly - I've studied my Bible too!

There's lots of information out there to help you make an informed decision. But be advised, whatever you decide, others who are just as informed may disagree with you! So, let's agree that smart people can disagree! Okay!

Yes, I certainly do fall into one of these two camps. But let me say this. I think the question, "*which side are you on?*", **is the wrong question!**

Regardless of what side you are on, the right question according to Paul is, what response or behavior is appropriate for you as a Christian – a citizen of the kingdom of God – as you relate to others who don't hold your position and may argue their position biblically too! Someone is

Paul starts off his argument on the subject this way...

Romans 14:1-4, *"Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters (we could even argue which side is weak and which is strong). One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. **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. **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."*

If God fearing people differ on this issue - that you can eat or can't eat – the only person they answer to is the Master – so don't judge them. Then he moves to the idea some honoring one day above another and others who do not. And finally, he returns to the food issue whether it's clean or unclean.

Romans 14:13-14, *"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. **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."*

Leviticus 17 chapters deal with what is **clean vs. unclean or contaminated.**

Skin Diseases.

Discharge of Bodily Fluids (Any bodily fluids natural or from wounds etc.)

Some live animals and foods were unclean
Dead carcasses along the way were unclean

That unclean contamination could be transferred through touch, sneezing, coughing or spitting. **Everyone became unclean from time to time**; it was unavoidable. **So what was the protocol when someone became unclean?**

Temple attendance strictly forbidden! So, it was really important for priests not to get contaminated since they served the people.

People contaminated by unclean food couldn't eat Passover for **30 days**. Otherwise, eating unclean animals made one unclean until evening. Most other contaminations made you unclean **7 days**.

People would have to immediately separate themselves from any socializing (quarantine) and go through hourly or daily cleansing processes.

Paul and those he was eating with knew what the Biblical consequences were if someone ate what was thought to be unclean and then came in contact with them! Both knew their bibles!

Paul ate with people who took different stances on the subject. He understood the implications of what would take place if he exercised his position.

Romans 14:15-18, *"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. Therefore do not let what **you know is good** be spoken of **as evil**. **For the kingdom** of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of **righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is **pleasing to God** and receives **human approval**."*

Now remember, Paul has already stated what he believes and that he was **convinced and persuaded by what the Lord revealed to him**.

Romans 14:14, *"I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself."*

So, if that is true, why not do what he was convinced Jesus showed him?

*So if you're convinced before God that **choice 1** is right, should you impose that truth on others and judge or criticize them if they choose **choice 2**?*

*If you are convinced before God that **choice 2** is right, should you impose that truth on others and condemn or criticize them if they choose **choice 1**?*

Go back to **Romans 14:15**, *“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.” NO! YOU MUST NOT CONDEMN!*

V15. **No longer acting in love**

V15. **Do Not Destroy someone for whom Christ died.**

In V20. He goes even further and says , **No do not destroy the work of God.”**

Revealed truth does not justify our condemnation of others!

Paul knew that in Jesus Christ, God had given him freedom. It was safe for him to exercise his freedom – when it did not create contention.

So in the immediate situation when facing a person who didn't feel the same freedom, how did he react?

Romans 14:19-21, *“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. **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. **It is better** not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.”*

You who are free and strong in your faith – yes – encourage the weak to rise above their fears. But don't push them to go against their conscience. **Grace!**

You who are weak, don't use Paul's words to strong arm those who embrace their liberty. You are expected to respond with the same **graciousness!**

We are all expected to make every effort to do what leads to **peace and mutual edification** – even if you believe differently! Not about unity of mind.

Listen to how Paul continues, **Romans 14:22-23**, *“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. **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.”*

Paul didn't keep his view hidden here. *Did he violate his own instruction?* He says he was convinced and persuaded that there was nothing unclean!

That you had freedom to partake and not suffer the consequences of coming into contact with unclean food. So he didn't keep what he believed between himself and God, did he? I mean he tells us here!

Did he violate his own instruction? No! He left his position in writing for us to see, but in the moment, he didn't throw his revealed truth in their faces and cause them to violate their consciences.

So the question of what we believe about our freedom is less important than how should we behave ourselves with people we disagree with biblically!

Verse 1 says, *Accept each other, don't quarrel or be argumentative,*

Verse 13 says, *stop passing judgment on each other.*

Verse 17 says, *the kingdom of God is about righteousness (not ours), peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

Verse 19, says we should make every effort to do what *leads to peace and building each other up.*

Verse 22 says *keep your opinion between you and God.*

Given our current situation, what view do I take? Well before I make that clear let me answer two questions and then make I'll make a statement.

*Am I at liberty to exercise my freedoms and condemn those who do not agree with me? **NO!***

*Am I at liberty to choose caution over freedom and condemn those who do not agree with me? **NO!***

Now for my statement, when I answer this question as to what side I am on, understand this: In the same way Paul revealed his position and then refused to argue with people who did not agree with him for the sake of peace and mutual edification - I refuse to argue my point with those who disagree or hold a pep rally with the people who do agree.

Paul says that it is important to be convinced and persuaded in our own minds to what God is calling us to believe!

But my answer doesn't justify any selfish behavior on my part. I must act with graciousness towards those who disagree.

1st question: What side do I lean toward? I lean toward camp 2!

Now, I do believe that governing bodies in our world, in the beginning, had to do something to ensure public safety. And they did! I do believe that for the sick, the elderly, the susceptible and immune compromised, quarantining, social distancing, wearing masks and gloves is important.

But for the healthy, I believe in the immune system that our creator placed in us and that we are probably weakening our immune systems by staying so isolated. And there are all kinds of inequities in the laws that have left me feeling like churches are viewed as non-essential and that simply isn't the case. Faith is the best remedy for fear and who better instills that in people than the church.

I can see that this crisis is being heavily influenced by money and politics. And lastly, as Christians, there are clearly written Bibles directives for us not to forsake assembling together – we need to trust God – and not fear! And at some point, (I am not sure of exactly if and when – we who are healthy and not susceptible may have to start meeting again regardless.)

Now, having revealed my position on this, let me answer ***Question 2:***

How should I behave and respond to different views?

As Paul said, I do not want to get in an argument or quarrel with you, I don't want to force you to do something that in good conscience you cannot do and I will make every effort to be at peace with you all and be edifying to you.

So, if you write me an email for the sake of argument, I will not respond. If you are posting on the church's Facebook to start an argument or even a discussion, from either perspective - it will be taken down!

We will love each other; we will lift each other up and support one another because we do not want to destroy you or the work of God in you!

Look, as citizens of two different kingdoms (USA – God's v.17) ...

WE'RE CALLED TO BE CITIZENS OF HEAVEN FIRST! THAT KINGDOM EXPECTS THIS KIND OF RESPONSE! That is God's protocol.

Hold on to what you believe and vote your conscience before God and country. If you're a **politician**, you have an obligation to stand out up for those you represent.

However, Be gracious to all!

Jesus said, Give to God what is God's and give to Caesar what is Caesars. Yes, we have obligations to both kingdoms.

But our primary obligation is to the kingdom of God first!

Yes, you have a right and obligation to stand up for your freedoms as a citizen of the USA!

But Paul's mandate says we should not exercise those freedoms at the expense of people around us. Be gracious!

The first 3 verses of chapter 15 conclude Paul's thoughts in chapter 14.

Romans 15:1-3, *"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."*

Jesus gave up His freedoms and liberty in order to give others life and freedom. He endured a lot of pain and insults to serve us.

That is what the kingdom of God is all about. We are **to Be Gracious** and to love one another! ***Not just in word but in actions.***

And sometime those actions are about limiting your words with one another.

Paul says if I am distressing you out over your position, I am not acting in love toward you. And if we fail in that...

We destroy people for whom Christ died. And we destroy the work of God in their lives. That is the most important thing this side of Heaven! God's work in people's hearts and I do not want to destroy that work in any way!

Do you know Jesus? He loves you so very much no matter what side of the fence you are on today. God is at work that is for certain!

Is He working on your heart? Have you embraced the gift of His Son He sent to bring you forgiveness and peace? If you haven't yet you can do it today!

It can be done by surrendering your heart to Him in prayer.

Would you pray with me?