



Sermon Transcription • Romans 14:1-12 (NIV)

## Disputable Matters

Pastor Jeff Bucknam

**[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]**

I'm going to tell you a little bit about an event that took place in the hallway, actually a number of years ago. There was a guy who came to our church and wanted to talk to me after a service on a Saturday night. He wanted to speak with me in the hallway and so I kind of hurried out from where I was. He was visiting the church, he was travelling through, and he said he had a word from the Lord for us. Great. Went out into the hallway, and – when I first saw him, I was surprised. Really big guy, right, lots of muscles, totally skipped leg day, but he was big, big dude, ok. So, he's talking to some other people at the time when he saw me, he turned and he shook my hand, you know one of those handshakes where you think, "Oh I think I'm broken a few bones in my hand because of that." And he started talking. He was very excited. He said, "Listen, I've got to tell you that I feel the Lord is telling me to share with you that I am a nutritionist. I have been involved with all this nutrition stuff, and I'm really involved in having Christians be healthy people. And one of the things that I have been burdened about recently, so I'm sharing this with you Pastor, and other pastors in the other region, is that there are great dangers in aspartame. That you shouldn't be drinking, as God does not want you to drink aspartame, or things with aspartame. Now, I need to tell you at this very moment that he was saying that, in my right hand, I had a Coke Zero [holds up can of Coke Zero], because I drink Coke Zero all the time. And I had it in my right hand, and he said those words. And I thought, "Oh dear, what do I do?" On the one hand, I'm thinking, "Oh I should probably just tuck that away, behind my back [demonstrates with can of Coke Zero] and just have him share more about this and try to get out of the conversation as soon as I can without him seeing it." Or I could do the kind of thing that Jeff Bucknam tends to do and that is take it, lift it to my face, open it up, and start to drink. [demonstrates with can of Coke Zero] And I did the second. So, while he was talking, I drank it and I said, "So, tell me more." <laughter> So is that the way you should handle that? That kind of thing. Because what we're talking about here, is what we call in the history of the Christian church, what we call a *disputable matter*. A disputable matter is a matter of conscience, about which God hasn't specifically spoken in his Word. There's no passage of Scripture, there's no eleventh commandment, "Thou shall not aspartame." You won't find that. He hasn't clearly forbidden it, but he also hasn't clearly commanded it, and you can understand the rationale though of somebody who comes along. And I don't want to dismiss our brother for feeling this way because you can understand his rationale. His rationale is, "Look if you're a Christian, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit according to Scripture. And if the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit you have stewardship over that body, and you don't want to put anything into the temple of the Holy Spirit that is going to be harmful to you. You want to do the best practices when it comes to being a steward of your body. Therefore, aspartame is not one of those things, so God



doesn't like aspartame." You can see the reasoning, right? And yet you won't find – that's like an extension from the Biblical concept that is gone two, three, four levels later, and you won't find that command in the Bible. And so, there are people who would hold one view on that, and others who would hold another view on that. Some would say aspartame is great, it helped me with my keto. And other people would say keto is evil, right? That's what God thinks by the way. <laughter> Anyway... right? But which - does this guy speak for God? Which side speaks for God? What is his will in these circumstances around disputable matters?

I'll give you another example. This is a dated one, but those of you who've been around the Christian church for a lot of years might remember something like this. There was a period of time in the Christian church where going to movies was not a good idea. In the early 1970s, I have a friend who was in the youth ministry, he was a student in the early 1970s or mid-70s, and he went to a movie one night with his girlfriend and a few of their friends. He said I think it was *Jaws* or something, right? So, he goes to this movie, he watches the movie, he comes home, goes to sleep, gets up in the morning and goes to church. Back in those days, during the church service, the high school kids would go and do a kind of a youth ministry thing at the same time that the church was meeting. So, he went downstairs with his girlfriend and with some of the people who went to the movie the night before. And when they got there, the youth pastor was standing in front of all of them and started to read off names that he wanted to come forward. And every name that he read off was a name of a person who had gone into the movie the night before to go watch *Jaws*. And so, they all came forward, and he, the youth pastor said, "Do you have anything you need to share with the rest of us?" And they were like, "Uh, no?"

"Where were you last night?"

"Well, we were just hanging out."

"No, you weren't just hanging out, I was sitting in the parking lot of the movie theatre and I was writing down the names of the students in our town who were going to the movies on that particular day. Is there something you need to repent of in front of all of us?" So, this youth pastor believed that going to the movies was... was evil. Because the things that are portrayed in the movies, like fish eating people, oh yeah, I think that's in the Bible... anyway, that that's bad. Ok? Some of you remember days like that. Some of you rejected the Christian faith because of days like that. Like I'm not going to a church or going to believe in a religion that bars me from watching *Indiana Jones*. Is that the way that the youth pastor should have handled it? Does he speak for God? And more broadly, how should we handle disputable matters in the church? There's so many of them as you'll see. Well Romans 14 actually talks about this. Talks about these matters of conscience about which God hasn't specifically spoken in his Word. And gives us some indications for how it is we can remain peaceful as a Christian community where people have different opinions on these things. So how do we do that? So, Paul is going to give you three steps in Romans 14. This is the first of two sermons on this subject. Next week we're going to have the second part, so I'm not going to finish everything today, but there are three parts to what he says in Romans 14 today. Number one - you need to accept one another. You want to live at peace with one another, you need to accept one another. Number two - you need to worship your way; and third you need to stay in your lane.



## [Accept One Another]

Accept one another, worship your way, and stay in your lane. Those will be kind of the hooks that we hang our thoughts on here, alright? So, here's the first of those. Romans 14:1-2,

“Accept the one whose faith is weak [see where I get the title *Accept One Another*, accept the one whose faith is weak, mark that phrase *faith is weak* we want to know what that means], without quarreling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.”

A little bit of historical background for this: the Roman church was built with two distinct kinds of people. There were the Gentile people who came from a background of pagan idol worship. And they came to faith in Christ from that and then there were the Jewish people who came from a background of Judaism. Now you know, if you know anything about Judaism, you'll know that there is such a thing as the Jewish calendar. And there are certain days in the Jewish calendar that are seen as holy. The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, this is the Jewish New Year. You have all sorts of days and festivals throughout the year. Passover would be one of them. There's a day of the week that is held apart as being holy and special, the Sabbath, and it starts on - at sundown on Friday and goes to sundown on Saturday. And you're not supposed to work in that time. And so, rabbis throughout the centuries have tried to figure out what does it mean not to work. What can you do, what can't you do. And they tried to delineate exactly what that means. So, there are lots of special days. If you came from a Jewish background, and you celebrated that Jewish calendar, and you came to faith in Christ, you would expect that we would continue to celebrate some of those calendar days and treat them as holy. And not work on the Sabbath, or the Lord's Day now. Similarly, those people used to eat certain things and not eat other things. If you were Jewish and growing up, that way you wouldn't eat pork. It was condemned in the Old Testament Law. So, my breath right now smells like bacon, because we had it between our services. Well, that's anathema. You shouldn't eat pork. You shouldn't also eat shellfish, alright? So, no lobster or crab or mussels or... it's probably a good thing. But you shouldn't also eat anything that is not prepared in a kosher manner. There's a lot of food laws, there's a lot of days that held as special. And if you were a Jew, and you came from that background, you would come to the Christian faith, and you would expect that if you really wanted to honour God, you should still keep that stuff. You should still not eat certain things. You should be like Daniel who went into a culture in Babylon where they wanted him to eat meat, and he said “No, I'm just going to eat vegetables and God will prosper me there.” That's the way we ought to be in a world that's not Jewish. We should trust God to provide for us while we keep those old food laws. So, you can understand if you come into a church and the guy sitting next to you is a Gentile and he smells like bacon wrapped scallops, you're like, “What is going on here? And he ate all of that while working on the Sabbath! You don't – what?” What would you do? And you know what you'd do. You'd go home later that afternoon, and you'd say, “Did you smell that dude? Like lobster – he stinks like shellfish!” And you would look down on him, you'd make judgements about him. And so, Paul calls people, these Jewish believers who are still holding onto that older mindset, he calls them *weak in faith*. Here's what he means by that. Doug Moo in his commentary on Romans, he says it really well. He says,



“Paul isn’t criticizing people for having a ‘weak’ or inadequate trust in Christ as their Saviour and Lord. Rather, he’s criticizing them for lack of insight into some implications of their faith in Christ. These are Christians who aren’t able to accept for themselves that their faith in Christ implies liberation [freedom] from certain Jewish ritual requirements.”

They’re weak in faith because they don’t see how far the Gospel has gone to take away some of those ritual requirements in the past. And they’re still exerting judgement on everyone else for something that has been done away with. Where others have freedom. So, they have disputable – the Roman church was divided over *disputable matters*. You’re listening to this and thinking, “Yeah, but what does that happen to do with – I don’t care if somebody eats bacon! I don’t care if you have pork chops or scallops, you know, or didn’t eat kosher food. What does that have to do with us today?” What kind of disputable matters do we deal with? You ready for this? I’ve got a list! [grins] Alright, I’ll give you one at the front end here. It’s a little bit obscure. When I was – when I first had our children, we realized very quickly that the hardest thing to do was to get them to sleep, for some reason. I remember praying to God and saying, “Lord, why have you not made it so that they have like a timer, that they just – you can just shut them off for a period of time and then they go to sleep for ten hours and then they wake up the next day. Right? That would have been a kind grace on your part.” But he doesn’t. and so, you’re up. And one of the biggest challenges you have is trying to figure how am I going to get this little person to go to bed and sleep. Well, there was a book out when I was – when we were first having our kids – there was a book out that was all the rage among Christians. It was called *Growing Kids God’s Way*. I just want you to think about the title of that. It was about how to get your kids to sleep. And apparently according to the book, there was a God’s way to do this. Did you know this? That the Bible teaches that you need to let your kids cry it out because, according to one section of the book, God let Jesus cry it out on the cross. Not kidding about that. Now people we knew had picked up this book and said, “It really works and it’s amazing, and it really is God’s way, and this is the way you should approach this whole thing.” And so, I picked it up and was like, “I want to do it God’s way.” And I remember reading this book and telling my wife, “We have to let them cry it out!” You know, and my son’s in the other room screaming for an hour.

And she’s like, “I just want to pick him up.”

“Don’t touch him! It’s not what God wants!” You know, like and you’re turning the page [flips through imaginary book]. Finally, she picked the child up, and picked Ethan up and walked into the other room and “See, he’s fine.” And he’d be like <baby noises>, right? I eventually – that’s the book, I’ve told you before, that’s the book I burned and threw in the back yard somewhere. But do you hear the idea? There were some Christians in the church who were saying, “Hey listen, if you really want to do it God’s way, you will let them cry it out.” And other people were like, “Really? It seems like it’s ok for me to pick the child up.” A disputable matter. It’s not clearly stated in Scripture. There’s no Second Opinions 4:6 that tells us, “Let them cry it out. Thou shalt let them cry.” It’s not there. So, what do we do?

I’ll give you some more. These are ones that I’ve heard over the years, my thirty-some years of being a Christian. I’ve heard about people’s viewpoints on having children. You of course know that the earth is filled with a population that it probably can’t sustain at this particular time. Although if you drive through Saskatchewan, you’re like, “Really?” [laughter] “I don’t know.” But overpopulation is a



challenge and is testing our resources, and there are those who are saying, “Look, if we’re going to be good stewards of the planet, which is what God has called us to be, then we need to limit the number of children that we have. And I know that ‘go forth and multiply’ but haven’t we multiplied enough? Enough already! So, let’s not multiply anymore for the sake of the planet, what God would have us do in our stewardship is not to have any more kids. That’s God’s way.” And the rest of us are like, “Well, I don’t know. Like, I like kids and I think that having more kids is lovely. And they’re like you know, arrows in a quiver, and they’ll be blessing in your old age.” Doesn’t the Bible say that as well? So, which one is God’s way? Who speaks for God in that situation?

How about schooling? Did you know that if you send your kids to public school and hand them over to the government in order to educate them, you’re handing them over to people whose worldview doesn’t match yours, who don’t believe in Christianity and are going to turn your kids away from God. Did you know that the best way for you to handle these things is for you to take your kids, bring them home, and educate them there? Even a Christian school, you can’t guarantee the doctrine they’re going to learn. Do your parental duty before God and homeschool your children. And then in comes the person who’s like, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa! Like homeschooled kids don’t really associate all that well with other kids. It seems like their upbringing is fraught... different. So, we should send the Christian school, because you get the best of both worlds.” And then the public school people are walking in and saying, “No, no, no. If you take all of the Christian kids out of the public schools, nobody’s going to be reached for Christ, right?” So, is that what God wants? Which is it? Well, it’s the one I believe, we say. That’s God’s way. That’s the one that should be done.

Should we eat sugar? I’ve had people speak to me in the last few years, in fact, saying that – you know what - sugar is actually a real problem. It’s worse than aspartame. Which is probably why I drink the aspartame, right? But it’s worse than aspartame because it causes all sorts of trouble and many of the diseases that we’re dealing in the Western World from that, so you give your children sugar, aren’t you basically leading them into a life of difficulty? Which is God’s way? You should not eat sugar. People tell me, “You should preach on that. Don’t eat sugar. It’s a bad idea. You want to do it God’s way, you won’t eat it.” How about clothing costs? Did you know that every young adult alive in this area recently has been convinced by the devil that Blundstones are what they need to wear? Do you know what Blundstones are? Blundstones are these shoes that in New Zealand they use for farmers, but here apparently if you’re 22 years old you have to wear Blundstones in order to be cool and accepted by Jesus. No, I’m not kidding! So, they are \$250 a pop, What?! Like you can fly to Los Angeles for the same price as you buy Blundstones. Is it God’s will that you spend \$250 on a pair of shoes or is it God’s will that you buy a pair of Kodiaks [lifts shoe onto table] for \$50? Right? [laughter] Which is God’s way? There is an internet – Instagram account called *Preachers in Sneakers*. It actually takes pictures of people doing what I’m doing right now, preaching, and showing the shoes that they wear. And some of the people preaching are wearing, like \$2000 pair of Nikes. And so, kind of the understood implication, should the pastor be wearing \$2000 pair of Nikes? Like is that really what God would want? Which is it? Should you, or shouldn’t you?

Or how about... how about your car you drive? I remember Chuck Swindoll, who is a famous pastor. He was the president of the seminary I attended. I remember he drove every day and he parked in the



same spot with his BMW convertible, green BMW convertible. Beautiful car! I remember students walking by that car, and just standing there shaking their head and saying, “How dare he? How dare he? It is a sin,” I’ve heard some say, even pastors, “It is a sin for you to drive a BMW in a world that suffers from such great need.” Is it? What about a Toyota? Is that a sin? Or does everybody need to drive a really cruddy GMC? Like is that what, like Jesus would be driving the Chevy. [laughter] Or what about the house? I heard some guys tell me one time, “I don’t think that God would want you to have a house that’s larger than 2000 square feet.” Really? Ok, yeah, I mean, his reasoning was in solidarity with a world, supporting how so many people don’t live in spaces like that. You don’t need more than 2000 square feet. So, you can build one that is 1999.9999 square feet and be on God’s good side, but if you go past the 2000, God is not happy with you. The extra room is where the devil dwells. Is it? Thou shalt not build such a big house. How about alcohol, this is one of the famous ones. You do realize what happens when people drink alcohol, right? I mean, they get inebriated, and all sorts of horrible things happen. Police officers say that if we stopped drinking alcohol, they probably wouldn’t have much a job. And you’re ingesting that alcohol and putting yourself in a situation that could lead you to some kind of sin? “God doesn’t want you to do that!” they say. You can’t worship God by drinking alcohol.

How about playing football? Some of you are like, “What?” Ok, recently an article appeared by a very well-known Christian publisher online saying that what should we do about the fact that we know that CTE, which is brain injuries in later life, is a definite result of children playing football and hitting their heads over and over again. Because if you think about it, you know, football, we say, here’s a piece of plastic we’re going to place on your head. Don’t worry, it’ll be fine. You’ll bash your head against that other guy with the piece of plastic, and if you do it over and over again for 30 years, you’ll be fine. But it’s not. It’s not happening. When they’re in their forties and fifties, these guys don’t remember their names, they get lost in the middle of nowhere, they don’t know where they live or who they’re married to. And they eventually die because of the horrible headaches. If you put your child in football, are you not somehow complicit in leading to their destitution later in their life? Is that God would have you, father and mother, do? Which is God’s way? How about yoga? Here we go. How about – did you know that when you – that yoga comes from a Hindu background and the poses themselves are formed in worship to particular gods and goddesses. You know when you’re doing those things, that you’re actually guilty of worshipping the devil, they say. And if you do it hot, that’s just more like hell, right? [laughter] And you’re like, “No, but I go when I – I don’t ever think about the demon when I’m doing that particular thing. I’m stretching and sometimes I pray.”

“Not to Jesus.”

“Yeah to Jesus.”

“No, to a devil.” So, which is it? Which is God’s way? And if you send your children out for Halloween, if you send your kids out for Halloween are you participating in the deeds of darkness? Have you sent them out into a world that is going to influence their thinking so that they come back with Ouija boards and stuff? Or... or, on the other hand, should you actually engage in Halloween because it’s like one of the most hospitable holidays we have. What other time do you have kids knocking on your door saying, “Give me candy.” If that happens a lot, you live in a weird neighbourhood. But like, when else? Shouldn’t you be friendly and kind back? And let me finish all this by mentioning Santa. Right? Did you know that if you rearrange the letters in Santa, [laughter] <wryly> You think that’s a coincidence do



you? </wryly> He takes away the attention from Jesus. The Easter Bunny takes away the attention from Jesus. We should rid ourselves of any of those sorts of things. Right? Which is it? Which is it? Which is God's way? And the thing you need to understand here is that you can actually be weak in faith and strong in faith, depending – at the same time – it just differs with the issue. Right, so there's somebody might be strong in faith in the sense that they say, "No, Santa's great. I can still worship Jesus and celebrate this cultural phenomena around this fat guy who hands gifts out. But there's no way that you can do yoga!" See you can – it depends on the issue. So how should Christians then act towards each other over such disputable matters? And Paul gets really clear, verse 3. He started by saying accept one another and what he means by that, Romans 14:3,

“The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, [the strong one, the one who eats everything, should not treat with contempt the weak one, the one who does not] and the one who does not eat everything [the weak one] must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

You notice there's a difference in the verbs that are used with how these people treat each other? The strong when they deal with the weak, they treat them with contempt. And the weak when they deal with the strong, they judge. And that's how it works. If I have freedom to do a particular thing, and I find out that you don't, here's what I do. “[snickers] Really, you don't have freedom to do that? Well, ok.” Ok. The language there, the verb itself means to reject with disdain. I was in North Carolina, this last, couple weeks ago with one of our elders, Mark Burch, one of our pastors. And I kept bringing up that we should be going to Waffle House. If you've never been to Waffle House, in the south, southern part of the United States, Waffle House is an institution. It's open 24 hours. It's largely terrible. But it is - you have to go. In fact, I remember going to a Waffle House in Atlanta Georgia on one occasion, and I sat down, and I said, “What should we have here?” And the guy who was serving us says, “Man I don't eat here!” Right, so, that's Waffle House. But, come on, you're in the south, you have to eat Waffle House, that's part of the deal. It's like coming to Canada and Tim Horton's. You have to have it. So, we're with these guys, and every time they say, “Where should we eat?” I'm like “Waffle House! We should go to Waffle House!”

“We're not going to Waffle House!”

“Why not?”

“Because ewww ... Waffle House! I'd rather go to Chick-Fil-A.” Like you're eating some amazing meal there at Chick-Fil-A, and it's not waffle. And that attitude though, is just the disdainful flat rejection: who would ever eat at Waffle House? Who would ever do ...? Who would ever not do yoga? Who would ever not want to drink ... who would ever want to drink alcohol? Like that's the way that we tend to view those people who have freedom tend to view those who don't have freedom. You can see it even in the way that we respond to the list that I gave. We laugh at somebody who might not have the freedom to do those kinds of things. And Paul says you should not reject with disdain, you should not treat with contempt those who don't have the freedom. But on the flip side, those who don't have the freedom tend to want to judge those who do. And you know what I mean by judge there, like put themselves in the seat of God, and say “This is the way it should be. Thou shalt not ...” Because it's my conviction, it's everybody's conviction. Isn't that really what the guy's doing when he lines all the youth up at the Sunday service and says you know what, you guys went and saw *Jaws* and therefore



it's wrong. Because God doesn't like fish that eat people. Right? But in Jonah, but - I see things the way that God sees them. And Paul's advice is, here listen, whichever category you fit in, in whichever issue, don't treat with contempt, or don't judge. In fact, Romans 14:4,

“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.”

I remember going to my friend's house in, years ago, I was visiting New Zealand. After moving here, I went back, and he had a little – they had a little boy. And I was sleeping in the same room as their little boy was. He was fifteen, fourteen months old, so he's in his crib. I just remember him standing up at the edge of his crib and staring at me all night. You know? It was very freaky. <creepy voice> “I'm going to get you.” </creepy voice> But I had kids about the same age, and I remember thinking to myself, oh he's so cute. So whenever he'd wake up and stare at me and stuff, I'd go over and play with him and pick him up, because that's what we did. Remember? We burned the book. So, I'm picking the kid up all the time. And so, I remember going out of the room, after an hour of playing with him, and saying, “Look who's up?” and the parents were like, “What are you doing? Why do you have him in your arms? Put him back down. Put him back where you found him!”

“Oh, OK” You know, and I put him back in the room and then he would stand and sit and look at me for the next hour. I remember my friend Brad came in and said, “Listen I don't mean to be... we didn't mean to be short with you. It's just that we have a particular way that we want to do these things. And it's a little bit weird for you to come into our house, with our kids, and start to parent them in the way that you would do it with yours.” And he was right. If I came into your house, and your kids were playing a video game and I walked in front of it and I, in righteous justice, kicked that Xbox, “The Lord is free to move in this house now because the evil Xbox is done! You have way too much screen time, you children! Get outside and dig a hole!” You know? You would be probably be like, “Hmmm, actually, Jeff you need to not do that, because this isn't... they're not your kids.” This is what Paul is basically trying to say, who are you to judge someone else's servant? We stand before God. He's our Father. He's the one who has the right to determine for us which one is right, and which is wrong for us. So, accept one another, number one. I know that was the longest piece. These next two are a bit quicker because now that we've established the basis for it, it all kind of flows.

### **[Worship Your Way]**

The second thing he says is worship your way. Look at verse 5,

“One person considers one day more sacred than another [Right? Day of Atonement, or Sabbath]; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. [You do you. Don't you love that? What do you feel is the best thing for you and your family? Ok, that's what you should do. Be fully convinced in your own mind.] Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God [the strong are worshipping God through their strength and through the freedoms they have]; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God [those who are weak are worshipping God through their convictions. Both are worshipping].





For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. [So, we answer to him. Not to your neighbour.] For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.”

So, in other words, you listen, if you have conviction about one of these disputable matters, awesome! Live that way. Worship God that way. But the moment you take that conviction and you start to express it on everyone else and principle-ize it and make it the way that the Lord would have everyone act, that's when you're crossing the line. Because you can worship your way. You can worship God either way. And you have to ask a question at this point, thinking, “Really, can you? How do you worship by watching movies?” Because there are some people who will say that, “No you can't. I'm going to worship God by not going to the movie.” And by the way, that is absolutely legitimate. You don't have to go and watch that movie. You don't have to. You can say in honour of God and what he calls us to in holiness, I'm not going to go and watch that movie. But somebody else could go and watch that movie and they could worship God by engaging that film, by comparing what's being said in that film to the worldview they know in Christianity, so that they can engage it more publicly with other people and talk about it. This is the way that Christians for centuries have dealt with art. Not by always turning their eyes away, but by looking and engaging and comparing it to the Christian worldview. Wrote a doctrine about it. You can worship God this way. You know, you can worship God by not going to yoga. That's awesome! I'm not going to go because of its history or background, I'm not going to go and do Halloween because of its history and background, we're not going to celebrate Santa because of its history and background. Fine. Totally cool. But you can worship God by going to the yoga and praying to Jesus during the stretching. You can. You can go on Halloween and not worship the demons. You can welcome people into your home. You can welcome the children on your street in the spirit of hospitality, praying for those who come, to see them come to faith in Christ, and celebrating that this one of those events, during the time that the entire community gets together in some weird way and wants to be welcoming to each other on some level. You can worship either way. And that's Paul's point. You do you. Worship your way.

### **[Stay in Your Lane]**

And finally, he really does, he comes to this big point, is really at the end here. And I summarized it by saying, “Stay in your lane.” Here's what he says, Romans 14:10 – 12,

You, then [verse 10], why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written:

“As surely as I live,' says the Lord,  
'every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.



It's not your job to judge your brother or sister. They answer to God. Now I want to pause there for just a second as we finish here. That's actually difficult to accept, because there's another passage in the New Testament that talks about how we actually should judge our brothers and sisters. So, what's the difference? Let me show the one where it says that we should judge our brothers and sisters. It's in 1 Corinthians 5. What's going on in the background there is that a son in the church actually is sleeping with his stepmother. And the church is like, "Woo-hoo! Freedom in Christ, baby!" And Paul's like, "What?" So, he responds, 1 Corinthians 5:1-2,

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?"

You should have kicked him out of the church, man. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13,

"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world ["I'm not talking about people who are not Christians," he says]. But [verse 11] now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister [anyone who claims to be a Christian] but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard, or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? [What's the assumed answer? Yeah. Are you not to judge those inside? Yes.] God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked person from among you."

It's your responsibility to judge these people and to pass church discipline on them, so that they can return to the fold in righteousness. So, which is it? Should we judge our brothers or sisters? Or not judge our brothers and sisters? We... 1 Corinthians 5... what's the difference between 1 Corinthians 5 and Romans 14. And here's the answer: one, Romans 14... or sorry, 1 Corinthians 5, one is a clear sin with direct Biblical support. Sexual immorality. It's a clear sin with direct Biblical support. And the other is a disputable matter without clear Biblical command. What day you celebrate. What kind of food you can eat. In the case of the latter, the disputable issues, you've got to let people be. Because you're not their judge, God is. But you... Listen. We hate that. Because like with most judges and umpires and referees in our world, we say to ourselves, "I have a better view than you. I actually can offer some advice to you, O God, O Great Referee in the Sky, I can offer advice to you that will actually help you make this judgement. If you just see it my way." I have a friend, actually, who was telling me a story. It's kind of a famous story about baseball circles, about this pitcher who goes out and he starts throwing the first pitch of the game. The catcher is ready to catch. "Play ball!" they say, and the pitcher throws the pitch. <baseball sound> Straight down, right in the middle of the strike zone. And the umpire says nothing. Nothing. So, the catcher takes the ball and hands it to the umpire, and says, "Can I have a different ball?" And the umpire says, "OK," and gives him another ball, he throws it back to the pitcher. Second pitch. <baseball sound> Straight down the middle of the plate. And the umpire



says nothing. The catcher takes the ball, hands it up to him, says, “Can I have a different ball?” The umpire’s like, “What? Ok yeah.” He gives him another ball. Throws it back to the pitcher. Third pitch. <baseball sound> Straight down the middle of the strike zone. The umpire says nothing. The catcher takes the ball, hands it to the umpire, says, “Can I have a different ball?” And the umpire says, “Alright, why do you want... need another ball? What’s wrong with this one?” He said, “I just need one you can see.” That’s the way that we view most things, isn’t it? From my vantage point on these matters, God, is way better than yours. You could probably use my help in terms of giving you some advice.

I was a coach of an AAU basketball team at one point in the States. It’s like a select team, a rep team. And I was coaching Grade 9 kids in AAU. We were a pretty good team, and I was a vocal coach. And one game the referee was just not giving us any calls in the first part of it, and so every time he’d run by, I’d say “Man, you need to not quit your day job.” “You’re much better than this.” “You look able-bodied to me. Surely this is something you can get better at, right?” “Maybe you need to go to some training.” I actually, at one point offered him the glasses of a friend, “Hey, here you go.” Finally, he turned to me and he said, “Hey! Jeff!” And he knew my name because he was kind of a friend. And he turned to me and said, “Hey Jeff! Why don’t you coach... why don’t you coach, and I’ll referee. You got it?” And I said, “Oh, I got it!” And he turned around and I said, “Just let me know when you start.” [laughter] So he turned around and, “You’re out!” That’s the way we tend to view it though, isn’t it? Lord if you just asked me my opinion about these matters, I could help you understand why that person shouldn’t be doing that freedom, or why that person should... should be having it. I can determine these things for you.” As a woman who was a leader in our youth group who my pastor Ken Hutchinson, years ago, he used to call her Four. Her last name was Fors, but he used to call her Four. The reason I call is because she’s thinks she’s the fourth member of the Trinity. Right? He’d call her Four all the time, to her face. And she’d giggle about it. And he’d say, she just thinks God needs her help. And I got to tell you, a lot of us think God needs our help. And what Paul is saying is he doesn’t. He doesn’t. You can let people be. You can let them have their freedom. It’s not our job to judge our brothers and sisters over disputable matters. That’s God’s job. He’s better at it than we are. So, [opens can of Coke Zero and drinks] Stay. In your lane. [laughter] Amen.

Let me pray for us.

Father, I am thankful for your grace. And I’m thankful Father that your Word speaks so bluntly about so many of these issues. Again Father, this is the first part of two There are important ways in which the strong need to treat the weak, with charity and kindness and welcome and not leading them into sin. So, I pray Father that this will be pinned together, with... this sermon will be pinned together with the next one in the minds of people. But let us not lose the emphasis here. We tend to enthrone our opinions and treat other people with disdain because they don’t have them. Or judge them because they don’t have them. So, Father, I pray that we would not do so. That we would love our brothers and sisters, and as people who have experienced the grace of Christ, may we pass that grace onto others. And may our church be a place where grace is enthroned. We pray it, Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.