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ROMANS 14

Romans Series: How God Changes People

If you would open your Bibles to Romans 14, that's where we're going to pick up our study today.

It's only then a couple of weeks that we'll be in the book of Romans now. We're coming to our conclusion in this study. I'm not quite sure how many more weeks. I know that next week we'll be in chapter 15. I don't know whether we'll be one week in 15 or two, but then my plan is to move to the Old Testament book of Jonah. I think you'll find that to be interesting. I certainly will. So I'm looking forward to that study myself and then presenting that to you.

We've enjoyed some great truths from the book of Romans and I think that today has a lot of content. So I'm going to put on my professor role and do a lot of teaching here from God's word and try to draw out some principles that I think are foundational for our Christian faith.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Each time, Lord, we open your word we know that you speak to us. Your word is living and active and it penetrates our hearts. We know that the heart is a very important place where things need to be adjusted and changed. Our emotions need to be controlled and desires need to be managed. So we thank you for your word that does that deeper work inside of us and changes who we are. Lord, we want to hide your word inside of our hearts so that we won't sin against you. We know that when that word gets into the heart, not just into our heads, that it affects our behavior. So it's in this moment that we're asking you to speak to us and use your Holy Spirit to reveal new ideas and new truths from this passage of scripture. In Jesus' name, amen.

One of the beautiful things about God's church is that He allows people who are very different from each other to come together and be able to join a unity together. It means that we need to know how to handle the differences that we experience. The church is not a dictatorship where one person decides how everybody's going to act. It's also not a democracy where we rely on the popular opinion to decide how we're going to respond to life situations. In the Bible, in God's church, initiative is encouraged because everyone has a spiritual gift who's accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. That means they have a sense in which they're leading in using that gift. So there's this way in which we're all different and we're working together and we accept the differences that we have that we experience together.

This tension that exists between diversity, that we're all diverse people, and unity is an important tension that we must understand how to manage as we relate to each other. It's to that end that we come to a passage in Romans 14:1, which says this: *Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.*

There's some principles here I want you to understand just from this verse. Number one, notice the words I've underlined – *accept* and *without quarreling*. That gives us our response, our pattern that we should have. The takeaway that we see, when arguing crosses the line of relationship you're doing the wrong thing. So this idea of accepting without quarreling identifies this relational pattern that we need to have. If we start arguing with people we've crossed the line and that line is an important one that we need to avoid.

Now we're talking in particular about disputable matters in this particular passage. I want to define this for you because this passage is dealing with a very specific kind of difference. In a marriage relationship or in a family (I'm going to try to apply this to family today) there are differences that we experience. But this isn't referring to all differences, only some.

Now in some families some like it hot and some like it cold. Some like it messy and some like it more organized. Some are more punctual on the early side and some are more punctual on the late side. All of those things can create conflict. If those are challenges you're experiencing in your marriage relationship or with your friends, that's not what we're talking about today. Those are preference issues and we're not particularly talking about those issues.

We're talking about a specific kind of problem today. We're talking about conscience issues. These conscience issues are where the conscience and faith interact inside of our hearts. This is a very important part of the heart that we need to understand because God has done some very special things inside of our hearts. When conscience and faith cross, convictions develop. That's inside of your heart.

Let me give you some examples of how recently I've seen this played out in relationships. Here's one. You want to go to Target, but your husband believes we should boycott Target because of the transgender bathroom policy. It's a matter of conscience as to whether you're going to do that or not.

You want to cross the street, but your son says, "Dad, wait. We can't cross the street here in the middle. We need to go down to the crosswalk." It's a conscience issue. He believes there's a right way to do that.

You want to wear the sloppiest pants that you can wear as a young person to church and your dad says, "Nope, we're not doing that. That's not what we're going to do." That's a conscience issue that we're wrestling with.

You want to take your kids trick-or-treating, but your friends think Halloween is satanic because of its history.

All of those are conscience issues. Now you probably have strong opinions about some of those things, maybe all of them, and that's okay. But this passage isn't about being right or arguing your position. This passage is about being godly when there are differences that exist. So when we talk about disputable matters we're talking about some things that exist between us that we believe to be right or wrong, yet there are some things that simply cannot be and do not need to be agreed upon.

The third thing I want to point out, just from verse 1, is that we're talking about two characters. Only one is mentioned in verse 1. We're going to read about the other one as we continue on.

One of the characters is the person whose faith is weak. If we do a study or kind of look at the passage and see what we're talking about regarding this person, we can define the weakness this way. The weaker brother is the one who chooses a stricter view of the matter, a matter of conscience now, and believes that their choice is the right choice before God, not only for them, but also for other people. That it's normative for Christians; nobody should do this thing. That's what they believe. So this person is weak. This word 'weak' is used because they have a lack of understanding of Christian liberty or Christian freedom. That's what it means in this passage to be weak.

Now this is going to pose some rather interesting challenges, I think, in our lives because now we have to be sensitive to each other. There are some people who have challenges. They're sensitive about all kinds of things that are going on in their lives. So we have some problems that we experience. We need to be able to work on these as we're trying to maneuver around disputable issues and challenges that we face.

So let's go to verse 2. Notice it says – *One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.*

What this is going to do is define our weaker brother a little bit more. We're talking about faith issues. It's talking about someone whose faith is tender. That's the idea of weak here – tender. So the idea is they are not quite gelled in this area of Christian freedom to feel that they can go and do whatever they want in disputable areas. The Bible is very clear about some things. We're not talking about those things. We're talking about the areas of gray areas, which there may be differences or opinions that people have or there's no direct command that God has about that particular thing. It has to do with this person believing that he is sinning if he's eating something besides vegetables. He believes that this is where he needs to be in his faith relationship with the Lord.

Now I want to explain what this is so you can understand the role of the conscience here because these are conscience issues. So let me step back and give you some theology about how God makes a person. He gives everybody a heart and inside of the heart there are lots of things. It's the wrestling place. It's where we make decisions about life. If you're wrestling with something in your life right now, you're doing that inside of your heart.

Now God places some things inside of your heart to prompt the heart. One, of course, is God Himself, the Holy Spirit. When we accept Jesus, He comes and He prompts us. But another thing

He gives to every person, whether they're saved or not, is He gives them a conscience. That conscience has a very important purpose in our life. It says to us, "I should" or "I need to." That's what the conscience does for us. "I should" or "I need to."

Now when the conscience is saying "I should" or "I need to" in life for whether you're saved or not, that's one thing. But when you get saved and now you have God's word, that's also saying I believe this, therefore I should do this. Now you have a cross between the belief, the faith that you have, and the conscience. At the point where those meet something very important happens within the human heart. Conviction develops. I believe something therefore I act. And passion develops as well. That passion is very important and that's what's being addressed here.

Here's what happens. If someone has come to that cross in their heart and they believe that eating vegetables is what they need to do and you come along and say, "You can eat anything you want," you're messing with something inside of the heart at that very important point where conviction and passion develop. You don't want to mess with that. You want to be very careful about that and that's different for each person. So we need to be able to honor what God is doing because we want that person to feel that sense of passion on the inside and we want them to be zealous about life. If you start watering down their convictions then they lose that.

So this is a very important discussion that we're having right now from Romans 14 about being concerned about another person's conscience when you're choosing to make some actions or choosing to do something or even requiring that other people do it.

Now we all know people who have kind of black and white thinking. The person who has a black and white thinking is the person who gets angry quickly when something doesn't fit into the way they think it should be. That's the passion we're talking about, and the black and white thinking is what we're talking about inside the conscience.

Now I would suggest that some people who have black and white thinking need to moderate that a little bit and grow in their understanding that there may be different ways, different perspectives to handle it. But the black and white thinking is the same idea here that we're talking about. When faith and conscience cross there's a passion that develops. So that's the importance of this particular dialogue and this discussion.

There are two characters that are mentioned in this story that we want to talk about. There's the one who eats and the one who does not eat. Those are two different people and in this passage we have warnings for both of them.

Now we don't have to look at eating only. We can look at participating in things. Maybe you feel like getting a tattoo is acceptable and someone else believes it's not acceptable. So that's the one who tattoos and the one who does not tattoo. Okay? So you could put whatever you want in here of a disputable matter.

But we're not talking about things that have to do with things that God has ordained that are true and right in His word. So you can't say, "Well I've decided to sleep with my boyfriend." No, the Bible has things to say about that. We're not talking about that. Those fall outside of this

passage. We're talking about specific things that are not described directly in God's word, but we take principles and apply them to those.

So here we are with the one who eats and notice the warning to the one who eats. This is the one who says, "Look, I can eat meat. It's not a problem. Even if it's offered to idols (that was the issues in that particular passage), it's not a problem. I can do that." The temptation for that person, notice, is to treat with contempt.

That idea of treat with contempt means to look down on the other person. You can't look down on the other person and say, "Look at him. He's so narrow in his opinion." We can't do that. You cannot look with contempt on the other person. That's the warning for the person who is more free in their ability to choose things to do.

Also notice the warning for the person who does not eat. This is the person who's rather strict in their spirituality. They've got a very clearly defined list of things that they do or don't do, and that's okay for them, but their temptation is to judge other people who choose to do those things.

So we don't want to judge and we don't want to treat with contempt. In fact let me put it into this dialogue if I can.

We have the insensitive brother. I used the word insensitive, I didn't know what other word to put there. I could've put stronger. But I was thinking is he really stronger? I don't know. Maybe I should've put stronger. But the two people represented on the top, we have the insensitive brother and the weaker brother. They're characterized by the loose view and the strict view that the weaker brother has, and then the temptation that we have.

You've got to evaluate yourself. Are you tempted to judge other people who don't live the way you live? Or are you tempted to look down on people who don't live the way you live? If that starts to happen in your life then we've got a problem. That becomes that challenge that we experience.

I want to jump ahead to the passage that talks about love. Right in these verses at the end of chapter 14, it says, *If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.*

I want you to see that one of the key elements here, the primary goal here is not to be right. This is where the battle is fought for a lot of people. A lot of Christians will fight over different things of whether we should do this. Can you go to yoga class or not go to yoga class? Because yoga has some eastern religious background. People will fight over these things. Should you have Santa Claus in your Christmas experience or not? So people have all kinds of problems that they get into about this. The point of the passage is love is the most important thing, not being right or wrong in disputable matters.

So 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. And then verse 19 – Let us

therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. So those verses will guide our thinking as we continue on.

Now go back to verse 4. I want to take us back through this passage a little bit further. In verse 4 it says, *Who are you to judge someone else's servant?* If you look at the word *judge*, you can think weaker brother. If you see the words *contempt* (you'll see those), think about the stronger brother. *Who are you to judge someone else's servant?* (speaking to the weaker brother) *To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.*

In verse 5 we're going to make a shift now and we're not going to talk about what you eat, we're going to talk about what day you worship on. It's not so much of an issue for us, I don't think, in our lives, but it was a big issue for them in the early church because Saturday was the day to worship. If you were a Jewish person you understood this. That was the Sabbath day and one of the Ten Commandments was to keep it holy. And now Christians are worshipping on the first day of the week, Sunday. That became their tradition to start worshipping on the first day of the week.

They've got this inner struggle that they're wrestling with, so in verse 5 it says, *One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.*

I want you to see that this is a personal conclusion that we all must come to in our lives. Not just about what day we're going to worship on, but the decisions that we're going to make in these disputable areas. It is a personal decision between you and God.

Look at verse 6. *Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. See, it's between you and God. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.*

Each person, you see, is fully convinced in his own mind what's right. Now there are some times when we fellowship together when we learn things from each other. We'll see that's going to be one of the benefits of living in a community. Because I might come with some opinions about certain things and you might change my ideas. That's one of the benefits of wrestling and working together and living life together because we start to broaden our thinking or become more clear in what we choose to do or choose not to do.

You might say, "Well it's my life. I can do whatever I want," and that's why the next verse is so important because it isn't your life. Verse 7 says, *For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord.* So our primary goal as Christians is we're not living for ourselves to do whatever we think is best or whatever we want to do. We're living our life for the Lord. What does God want me to do? That's the question.

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. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

Our primary response in life is not to be right or to please ourselves. Although that's what you're going to hear in the world by people who are not Christians. Their desire is to be right or to please themselves.

See, as Christians we think differently. We respond differently to life situations. We ask a different question and that question is, what does Jesus want me to do? What does the Bible teach? How does God want me to live? Paul is giving us now some instructions and some guidelines of how we are to react to each other.

We've talked about how we are to position ourselves. Now starting in verse 10 we're going to go back to these two problems, the one for the weaker brother or the stronger brother, and you use the word *judge* and *treat them with contempt* in this next verse.

Verse 10: *You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Obviously the warning to the weaker brother. Or why do you treat them with contempt? Obviously the warning to the stronger brother. For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.*

There is a danger of establishing a false sense of holiness that somehow governs a person's life in a way that imposes that on other people. So we have to be careful about imposing that on other people. Whether you're weaker or stronger you can't insist that other people live life exactly the way you do because God wants this personal experience.

If I were to set a list out for you and for our church and say, "At Calvary Chapel Living Hope we do these ten things and we don't do these ten things," you know what I would do? That's legalism and I would rob you of the power and the freedom that the Holy Spirit wants to give you. God wants to direct us internally and for someone to establish a list of dos and don'ts can be a problem because it can rob us of what the Holy Spirit wants to do deeper inside of our lives.

Verse 11 continues the dialogue. *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.* You're responsible to God for the choices that you make.

Now we come to the practical issue of the stumbling block starting in verse 13. *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.*

There's a difference between what we may do and what we must do. Very important that we understand the distinction here. Neither the weaker brother or the stronger brother can put a demand on others or at least needs to be careful about how they do so.

Verse 14 says, *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.* It's important for us to be convinced in our hearts as to what is right and wrong. James 4:17 tells us that again. *If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.* So this is a very important decision. I don't want to say none of these things are important. They are important and you need to decide before God what you're going to do in regards to that.

Go on to verse 15 in our passage. *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.*

It follows that the weaker brother is not the one who can't just ignore the convictions of someone else and impose judgment on that person. There is a process of rethinking that goes on in our lives. As we talk to each other, we're in small groups, and so on, the Lord conforms our thinking and helps us change. As we grow in our lives that growth is important. The whole idea of weak that he uses here implies that the person is growing or needs to grow in their life. So the person who has this narrow version of spirituality for themselves needs to grow, not in changing their narrow view of spirituality for themselves, but understanding of Christian freedom. That's where the growth needs to take place so they can experience this same thing in their own lives.

Verse 16 says, *Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.* You don't want to let other people dictate for you and say, "You can't do this." So there's some sense in which we may stand firm and say, "I'm sorry. You can't dictate this for me."

Let me go on. I'm going to put this all together for you in a way that gives you four different responses that you can have all coming from this passage. But let me read the rest of this passage and take you through it, then I'll come back and we'll draw some conclusions.

Verse 17: *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.* That's the most important thing. It's not about these things like eating and drinking. They're not the most important things. It's about being who God wants us to be and being a part of that in our lives.

So verse 18 he continues. *So anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. 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.* That work of God is this thing I described inside the heart. *All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.*

Verse 21: *It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.* The word *fall* there is *skandalon*, which has the idea to fall into sin or fall into trouble.

God did not design the church so that anybody who says, "I'm offended by what you did," get to run the church. That's not how He designed this. What he's saying there is you want to be careful about your actions. You don't take a person who just got saved and has a problem with addictions into a bar. You don't do that because they're likely to be scandalized. The *skandalon* is used here. They'll fall into sin again. Be careful about what you do in the midst of those situations.

Verse 22: *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.* So the joy is on one's own behavior before God and not in the concern about what another person does.

Verse 23: *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.*

What this is saying is the small decisions that we make in our lives are all important to God. The details of our life are important. We make decisions about them regularly. You want to guard your heart and if you have doubts about something, don't participate in that. You need to abstain. It's okay, even if other people are doing it. The part of your heart where faith and conscience cross and form convictions is really important. You want to guard that piece of your heart that's very important for your own spiritual development.

Let me try to put this together this way. I believe when two people disagree about a disputable matter, a matter of conscience there are four options that you have. Four options that you have when two people disagree and they achieve one goal.

One of the options that you have is to stand your ground. That's from Galatians 5:1. *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.* So when we say stand your ground there's sometimes when you say, "I'm sorry. I have freedom in Christ to do this. Don't try to impose your legalism on me." That's a valid response and an important one that we can consider.

I don't want you to be quick to do this because that's not the only one and this passage is not really emphasizing this a lot. But sometimes you got to know that sometimes we take a stand with other people and we guard this freedom that God wants us to have.

The second option that we have is to teach the other person. Romans 15:14 says, *I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.* Now notice this is chapter 15, the very next chapter. We're still in chapter 15 talking about disputable matters, and he's saying you are very competent to instruct each other.

Let's take the issue of Halloween for example and let's say that someone is offended about Halloween because of its satanic origin. So what they do is they want to instruct someone else and say, "Let me explain to you the history of Halloween. Do you see what you're participating in with Halloween?" And the other person says, "Wow. I didn't know that. But let me tell you what I'm doing. I don't really care about the history of this. What I'm doing is I'm trying to use this to be a light in a dark world, so I'm handing out tracks as we're going around trick-or-treating, and I'm spending time with my neighbors and talking to them about Jesus."

Now which one of those people is right? Neither one of them are wrong. Some can look differently and one person might decide, "Well I'm not participating in that. I'm going down in my basement to turn all the lights off and I'm not going to let anybody know I'm here on Halloween." That's perfectly acceptable for that person to do that because they don't want to participate in the deeds of darkness that are happening out there. Another person may choose to be this angel of light out there (I shouldn't use that term because that's a term for Satan, angel of

light), but they're trying to be this light out in the community and share Jesus with other people. So teaching other people is one of those solutions.

Let's go to a third option that you have. I just want you to see all of these because they're all mentioned in Romans here and very important. In Romans 13:5 one of our options, and I think requirements, is sometimes we give in even if we don't want to. We look at Romans 13:5 which is all about authority.

If you're a young person here today saying, "Oh yes. Christian freedom, I'm going to that party on Friday night, even though my parents said no, because I have Christian freedom to do such things!" you've got a problem. Because we have in Romans 13:5 a very important verse about submission.

You might work in a business that says you need to have your hair cut a certain way. You might say, "I like my hair long," and that's fine. But you might submit because you're not in authority over someone else.

The purpose of authority is to punish those who do wrong and reward those who do right. That's a government authority. In a family, parents have a responsibility to establish moral criteria in order to train the conscience. So a young person needs to know how to submit to that even though they might feel like they have freedom in Christ.

I would encourage them and I encourage young people to do this. Create a notebook. Start writing the ways you're going to parent differently. But for now, while you're living in this home with your parents, you need to follow your parents' guidelines and the things that are outlined for you. That's a third principle that we have.

The fourth one is to accept, which means to agree to disagree, and that's what we're talking about in Romans 14:1. *Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.* That's the passage that we're talking about today.

There are four responses. Which one you choose is a matter of love. Let's go back to our chart again because the most important thing in this whole picture is the love that we have. I'm trying to kind of capture it in this picture that whatever you choose isn't about what you want or what you think is best. The idea here is that love is the most important thing.

Let's look at those verses in the middle there again. *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.* And then four verses later – *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.* Edification is building people up. If we're tearing people down and we're somehow damaging that part of their heart where things cross in the middle, that's a very significant place.

I know that I've been a little more academic here to try to draw your attention to these things, but I think in the scriptures here is a very important principle about the Christian life. If we get this then we've got something very important that will carry us through some of these challenging

decisions. When someone feels a sense of right and wrong you want to be able to respond to that gently and carefully, and not look down on with contempt or judge that other person. But rather if you want to teach them you can, or you want to maybe even give in to them to protect that very sensitive area.

Now that very sensitive area of the conscience of the heart where the conscience is is the place where God wants to live. So if you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior I want you to know there's a piece of you that's missing. When you ask Christ to come in, He fills that hole that meets you right in that very special place and provides that passion for life that's based on conviction. It's just an amazing thing.

So I want to invite you today if you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior to do that. Most important decision you can make. It means to say, "Lord, I know I'm a sinner. I need a Savior and I want you to come into my life and run my life." God delights in doing that and He transforms who we are. He ministers to us in a whole new and powerful way.

In just a moment we're going to sing a song. During that song it's going to be a ministry time after I pray and then we'll sing. It's a time when you have the freedom to come up here and pray. Maybe you're praying for someone, there's someone in your life that needs prayer right now. Maybe they've got a health concern or maybe they've got an important decision they've got to make. Or maybe they just need Jesus. You want to pray for them. Or maybe there's something going on in your heart that you're wrestling with something that God is doing in you. Maybe you've got an important decision to make this week or a health concern of your own. This is a time for ministry. It's time for us to come before the Lord and have brothers and sisters pray for you.

Prayer is powerful. We believe in the power of prayer here at Calvary Chapel and this ministry time is an opportunity for you to pray quietly or to come up for prayer. Either way we'll be glad to minister to you during this time.

So let's stand together and let's pray before we have a time of ministry.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we're coming before you now and asking you to minister to our hearts. Lord, we are needy people. We need you and sometimes we come into situations that are so overwhelming to us that we feel that need more than others. It's those times, Lord, we are grateful that you give us our brothers and sisters who can pray with us and for us to allow us to experience your grace in new ways. Lord, thank you for the opportunity we have to know you personally. We ask that you would work in those very sensitive areas of our hearts right now. We ask this in Jesus' name.