**Romans 14:1-15:13**

I. Background and historical context

 A. Paul is addressing “disputable matters” (v. 1)

 1. He is not addressing essential doctrines or behaviors in the Christian faith

2. Rather he is addressing issues on which two authentic Christians might disagree

 B. The practical issues in Paul’s day

 1. Whether it is appropriate to eat meat and drink wine or not (v. 2)

2. Whether we are supposed to observe certain religious days and festivals (v. 5)

C. The weak and the strong (14:1, 15:1)

1. The weak were probably primarily Jewish Christians. They were not legalists, but given their background in Judaism, there faith was “weak” in the sense that it did not allow them to eat all foods and stop observing days in good conscience.

2. The strong were probably primarily Gentile Christians who were not raised in Judaism, and so their faith allowed them to eat all foods and regard all days as equal as an act of worship to the Lord

 D. Paul’s perspective on the weak and strong

 1. Paul clearly identifies himself theologically with the strong (v. 14)

2. But Paul is not in any way shaming the weak. His perspective is clearly that they are making decisions based on what they believe will most honor and please the Lord, and they are therefore making good choices given their convictions

E. Some modern day parallels

 1. The issue of Christian liberty

 a. alcohol

 b. dancing

c. the extent to which we engage in certain cultural norms/activities (media, etc.)

2. Other disputable matters in the faith

a. worship styles

b. church styles

c. our use of money and possessions

d. our political convictions

II. What principles should shape how we form our own convictions on disputable matters?

 A. Be fully convinced in your own mind (v. 5)

Paul doesn’t call us to apathy or a wishy-washy attitude in these areas. Rather he calls us to carefully consider what would be best for us in these matters

 B. Live in a way that is “to the Lord” (v. 6-8)

Consider that we belong to the Lord, and ask: “how can I best honor and please the Lord in this particular issue?”

 C. Live in a way that “gives thanks to God” (v. 6)

Consider this: “how can I respond in gratitude to who God is and what he’s done for me in this particular area of life?”

 D. Live by “faith” (v. 23)

Make sure our actions and convictions are motivated by our trust in God (rather than being motivated by guilt, obligation, selfishness, etc.)

 E. Notice that there’s a level of subjectivity to this

Two people could be sitting next to each other doing exactly the same thing, and one might be sinning and the other worshiping God in that action. The key issue is the heart: what is motivating them to do what they’re doing.

F. These principles are a great litmus test for us as we consider our position/actions on disputable matters (alcohol, dancing, worship style, etc.)

III. How to view other people’s actions/positions on disputable matters

A. Command: Accept one another without passing judgment (v. 1, 13)

1. The strong are not to “look down on” the weak (v. 3)

The temptation for those with greater sense of liberty is always to look down on, make fun of, or pity those without that

2. The weak are not to “condemn” the strong (v. 3)

The temptation for more conservatively minded people is to judge those who engage in certain behaviors as worldly compromisers

B. Underlying Premise: You’re not their master! God is their master!

1. God, their master, has accepted them and will cause them to stand (v. 3-4)

2. Christ died and was raised so that he, not you, could be their Lord (v. 9)

3. Each of us will stand before the judgment seat to give an account of our lives and that ought to produce humility in all of us (v. 10-12)

IV. How to go about our own actions in disputable matters

A. Command: don’t do anything that would cause others to stumble or be distressed

 1. Don’t be a stumbling block (v. 13)

 2. Don’t cause them to be distressed or destroyed (v. 15)

3. Don’t cause them to stumble or fall (v. 20-21)

4. There are two ways this can happen

a. Celebrating our liberties in their presence might cause them to be offended, uncomfortable, or might tempt them to judge us

b. Celebrating our liberties in their presence might cause social pressure that would lead them to engage in behaviors that go against their own conscience

Either: offended, cause unrest

B. Underlying premise: God’s purpose for the church so much bigger than us feeling entitled to our liberties

1. Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit are far more important in God’s kingdom than whether or not we can drink our wine or eat our food (v. 17)

2. So make every effort to do what will lead to peace and mutual edification (v. 19)

Forego your liberties if they are going to cause relational problems

3. God’s purpose is to create a community that glorifies him with one mind and purpose (15:5-7)

V. Consider Jesus’ prayer

John 17:20-23: a prayer that we would be unified as a witness to the world

**Discussion Questions**

1. Some modern day examples of “disputable matters” were given on Sunday. What are some other contemporary examples that were not mentioned on Sunday?

2. Consider the principles Paul lays out for how we are to form our own convictions on disputable matters (see section II above). What was the most helpful or significant or compelling idea Paul raises there?

3. Consider non-essential areas of faith where you are tempted to look down on or judge other Christians (such as alcohol, engagement in culture and media, money, worship styles, church styles, political views). Was there any area that was convicting for you personally? Was there any specific area where you see a lot of judgmentalism in the church community at large?

4. Consider v. 19. Are you encouraged to do anything specific (or not do anything specific) in light of that verse?

5. How do we go about distinguishing between “disputable matters” on which we can agree to disagree and “indisputable matters” on which we believe strongly there should be agreement?