

**Stop Passing Judgment**  
**Romans 14**

**Are you a truth person or a love person?**

I don't know if you've ever had that experience, when someone is upset and they think you've done something wrong. As they talk about what's gone wrong, you're sitting there thinking, but that's not right – I didn't do that? I'm something of a truth person.

When that happens to me, it's like I'm going to explode if I can't say "no that's not right, I didn't do that, It wasn't like that, I did this and that, because of this you see, can you see?" I need to get the truth out, I can barely keep it in. I have a strong sense of injustice and I want to *explain* the truth. The thing is, sometimes, actually, it doesn't matter and it isn't helpful. What I need to say is, I'm so sorry, that must have been really upsetting.

I wonder about you.

We will all lean more towards either truth or love being primary. Of course you *want* to be both! But we lean one way. When you're under pressure, in a moment of conflict, either the desire to work out what's right... will rise up within you. Or... that will seem far less important than trying to *care for* that person: and you'll find it no big deal to leave discussing facts to one side, love takes control! **Which are you?**

Both truth and love are good, of course, and you need both. But sometimes there can be a clash. Well our passage today has something extremely important to say to us. It speaks about how to deal with situations when Christians disagree, and how we should treat each other.

And whether you are a truth person or a love person, as we come towards our special week of prayer and our planning day, where as a church, we want to discuss what the best way to honour God is, and spend our time and money– we won't all always agree. And the principles we'll see will help us, I have that in mind.

I also have in mind the disagreement the church of England is discussing at the moment – whether God intends to allow and bless homosexual marriage. And I'll come to both those two things at the end.

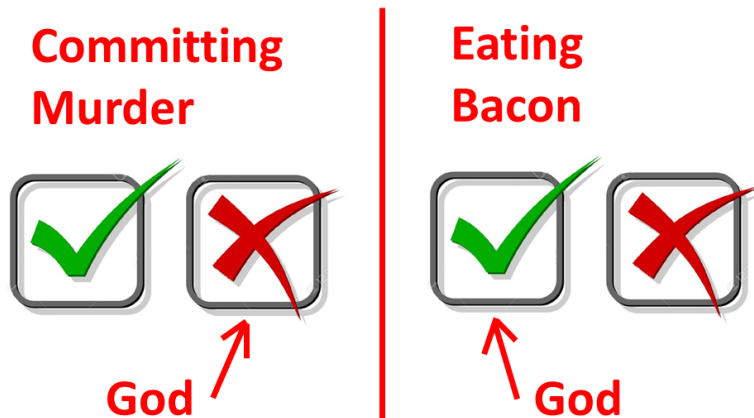
But let's start with the passage, where Paul works through 2 **examples** of conflict and disagreement in the church, and teaches us 4 principles we need to apply. Everything he says applies to one kind of situation, and we need to see what that is: In v1 he says "Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over **disputable matters**"

What are these disputable matters. They're obviously arguing about them, what are they?



Well, you'll need to keep this in mind, as we work through: Let me describe these two situations to you, here they are.

## Disputable Matters



Situation number 1: The issue is committing murder:

We've got conflict between two Christians, one thinks that murder is ok, "God allows it" - and the other thinks it is not ok. They have a difference of opinion.

In this case God says **no**.  
That's situation 1.

Situation 2 looks like this: The issue is eating bacon, is that ok?

We've got conflict between two Christians, one thinks it's ok, the other thinks it's not, God doesn't allow it. In this case God says **yes**, it is ok.

Now the really important thing to understand is this. One of these two situations is what we call a *disputable* matter. And, fairly clearly, it's the second one.

But not *just*, because of the gravity of the issues here.

*All* disputable situations, arise when God says something IS ok, but there is confusion and disagreement amongst Christians.

When God says something **isn't** ok, it's not a disputable situation, why? Because simply, if God says no, it's not ok!

So we're talking about **allowable** things (they, are disputable matters)

And we'll see, sometimes, in those situations although the truth is that they are allowable, love dictates that they're not – love trumps truth.

Ok, so let's look at Paul's two examples so that we can start to get into the issue more deeply.

Leave that image on the screen because *actually*: his first example *is* eating certain kinds of meat. Look at v2. "One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables"

What's going on here *is* exactly about bacon, and other non-kosher meat.

You see, God's people the Jews, before Jesus came, had certain kinds of meat that they didn't eat, including bacon. Imagine this, you're in your 60s or 70s (not too hard to imagine for some of you) and your whole life you've never eaten bacon (and some other meats) because you want to please God and do what he says. Then Jesus comes, and with him come some huge changes. Suddenly, the teaching about meat changes, you are now allowed to eat bacon! Woohoo!

However, after so many years, you find it hard, someone puts that bacon sandwich in front of you, and it feels wrong. You're not the only one, there's a number of Christians who think "I can't eat that, it's not ok". You just can't get your head around it, you still think/feel it's wrong.

The second example is about the Sabbath day:

v5 "One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike." Again, because of the Jewish to the special Sabbath day, some Christians kept Sunday special, they thought, you must(!) on Sunday Jesus rose again from the dead – defeating death, it's the new Sabbath! Some didn't consider Sunday special, but every day – because every day is a gift from God. These two examples are 'disputable matters'. And Paul sets out some principles.

But I want to give some possible modern day parallels, for you to chew over as we continue to investigate this. Think for example of a Christian going into a pub, or one step further, to drink alcohol, or alcoholic communion wine! Some Christians think it's ok to drink, or that it's ok to go into a pub. Some *don't*, they think you're going against God and becoming just like the world if you go into a pub and drink alcohol.

Or if that one seems too simple... how about this: Tattoos.

Leviticus 19:28 says "You must not put tattoo marking upon yourselves"

Some Christians think that's still the case, that you're going against God if you get a tattoo, and they wouldn't let their children do it either. Some think it's ok. What's the right thing to do, to allow them or not? To allow your friend or child to go through with it? or not?

Well, when Christians differ about these kind of disputable matters. When we differ about *allowable* things: v3 says "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."

And this is our first principle,

v4 "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall."

The first principle is the don't judge principle:

Don't judge someone else, why, because they are a servant of God, not a servant of you.

### 1) Don't judge, but respect.

We're talking about thoughts really, not just actions. Easy to agree with but hard to do: Don't judge.

Imagine that person who notices the person sat next to them in church has a huge tattoo, black and red. You can imagine what I'm going to say right:

They start to think in their head, "oh dear dear dear... that's just not acceptable, they shouldn't have done that. God won't accept that you know, he has very high standards."

They look down, they pass judgment.

Most importantly, they think <sup>(1)</sup> that's not right <sup>(2)</sup> it's not ok <sup>(3)</sup> God won't accept that.

That's what he means by 'judge' – the word can be used in lots of different ways, that's what he means here.

We see what Paul thinks of that.

V3 ends “the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, [why] for God has accepted them”

You can’t judge another Christian like that, because if they’re a Christian, God *has* accepted them. How dare we say or think that they are unacceptable!

But, not only that, Paul wants us to remember that God will be our judge too!

<sup>V10</sup> “You, then, 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.

<sup>11</sup> It is written:

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

<sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will give an account of *ourselves* to God.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.”

Do you see?

The first principle when you disagree: don’t judge but respect.

God will be their judge, and yours too.

Doesn’t that sound good? Judging others is so ugly isn’t it, doesn’t it feel right and feel good when we see God’s word speaking so firmly against it? Of course it does, but it’s not always easy to do.

What about the second principle? Well it comes from v6-8, and I’ve called it **the “all for God” principle**.

v6 “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; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord.”

If someone eats bacon, they should do so with thanks to God,

If someone doesn’t, they should do so for God.

If Sunday is kept special, then do it for and to God – not just because.

If no day stands out as special, then they are *all* for and to God.

If you don’t get a tattoo because of your faith, great.

If you do, do it *for* God and honouring him, great!

It’s the *all for God* principle.

And all Christians should practise it, all of the time.

Chapter 12 said “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice” – it’s the same idea.

The ‘all for God’ principle rules out this idea that man is an island. The idea that as long as you keep yourself to yourself, and don’t hurt anyone else, it doesn’t matter what you do.

Do you see? We should be doing everything to and for God – it’s not just about how we treat other people, it’s how we treat God! Whether we think of him, whether we aim to please him.

If two Christian people are in disagreement. They both need to ask themselves, are you doing this for God? Is what you want, to please God? (or is it yourself)?

Is it for God's glory and the good of others, or your own good?

If God was against it would you stop fighting your case, and lay it down, let it go? Or would you never give up? Are you really fighting for yourself?

Remember God is your judge, and he will be theirs too.

Think of what happens in a disagreement, as it gets heated, as the temperature rises, we lose sight of God don't we?

Come back, come back, ask yourself – am I doing this for God? What would be the best thing for honouring God?

That's the **all for God principle**.

Thirdly. And this may seem like a strange idea.

**The sin against your conscience principle.**

This is something you need to be aware of within yourself, and within others too.

The basic idea is that: you can be sinning, doing something that you're allowed to do – counter intuitively. Let's go back to the bacon example. Think of the person who has always avoided bacon to please God, they don't eat it.

But since Jesus changed that, now at church they are presented with that bacon sandwich. Now I want you to imagine that this person is still absolutely convinced in their heart that God doesn't want them to eat. But, they go against that conscience and eat – for whatever reason – “it looks so good”, or “everyone else is doing it” for whatever reason, they eat.

They're allowed to eat! No! For them.... It's sin.

They are convinced that God says no, and yet they did it anyway

Look at v14 this is the sin against your conscience principle v14 “If anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it **is** unclean”

It's obvious why right? Because in their head, they're going against God – don't do that, it's sin! And! Don't make someone else do that, because for them, it's sin.

What Paul wants, is not only that we don't sin against our own consciences, but that when we disagree with one another, when we discuss, we remember that even if we're right, it may be very unloving, and wrong, to push someone else – do you see. We're starting to see the importance of love, and not only truth. The sin against your conscience principle.

And that takes us nicely to our final principle.

**The love over truth principle.**

Listen to v15 “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 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.”

Do you see. Make *every effort* to do what leads to peace, and what encourages! Sometimes you need to put the argument about truth to one side. Yes you must discuss it, but if you can't agree what's right.

**In some cases**, we are to put that to one side, leave the truth, and show love.

So... don't go into that pub, don't go to that steak restaurant, cover that tattoo, so that you love your fellow Christians.

Let's take the pub for example, of course, you *can* go into the pub, God allows it. But just like you wouldn't take an alcoholic and say "just have one, it's allowed" (!)

If your Christian brother or sister thinks it's wrong, don't go there with them. Don't push them! Don't tell them you go!

Now, strangely, and this is not hypocrisy, you *can* go without them, and if they don't know. Why? Because God allows it, so the reason you don't go is for them. So if you're not going to harm, upset, or cause them to sin against their conscience – then you're free, go to the pub. Perhaps, just don't tell them.

This final principle, (the love over truth principle) asks us to go that extra mile.

You *are* free, but out of love, you are to not exercise your freedom.

Your love for them dictates your behaviour, not just the truth.

V13 summarises. "make up your mind not to put *any* stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister"

Those are, 4 principles, to help us when we face conflict or disagreement with other Christians. And actually, they're important principles at other times too.

But I want us to be careful. Remember that they only apply to allowable circumstances. So, if God says yes but my conscience says no, I mustn't sin against my conscience.

But if God says no, and my conscience says yes, that doesn't somehow give me special permission to go against God. Do you see? Just because I think murder is ok, in this one situation, because he really deserves it! my conscience says "yes it's right" but it's not. And I can't use this, to give myself permission.

And that's where I think the question about homosexual marriage fits.

Yes, there are disagreements between some Christians.

But God's word is so clear that it's **not** ok: Marriage relationships are meant for 1 man and 1 woman only. So no matter how someone might feel or how sure they might be, it's still wrong. Now of course, the principles we've seen *should* impact how discussion about that happens, and not judging. But it's not right in this to just put the truth to one side, in the way that in disputable matters like the meat and the special days, it would be right.

If that's something you want to talk about more, do come and ask Dave or myself about it. I suspect for most of us, more immediate will be these discussions coming up, on the best way forward for our church.

And how we listen, and how we talk about things together.

And perhaps, most important, is even the very idea that these principles give us, of the kind of generosity and care, and love(!) we should show to Christians we disagree with – should change the way we think, and force us to be more thoughtful.

At the end of the day, we may disagree, but Christ shed his blood (out of love) to forgive every single Christian, even the ones who get it wrong and say this or that – and we need to remember that.