

ROMANS NEVER ENDS | DEVOTIONAL | WEEK 6

Years ago, we were headed to a lake day with a bunch of people from our church for the Fourth of July. Excitement filled the air as we packed sunscreen, beach towels, and made sure the kids had their water shoes on. It was going to be a day of tubing, BBQ, and fellowship—an experience to remember.

But as I stood in front of my closet, I suddenly found myself frozen with indecision. Most of my bathing suits were from my “previous” life before being saved. I wasn’t worried about comfort or practicality—I was worried about what others would think. Would they judge me for what I was wearing? Would I be seen as immodest, or worse, as someone who hadn’t really changed?

Sweating, I wrestled with the tension between my personal freedom and the expectations of others before the husband walked in and bewildered asked WHY WAS I NOT DRESSED?! (A common occurrence in our house).

I frantically told him of the situation and belabored that If this were just a day out with family or close friends, I wouldn’t have given it a second thought. But because I was with people from church, the weight of perception felt heavier. He shook his head and told me to grab a swimsuit and to stop letting anxiety dictate the joy of the day.

Looking back at the young Christian mom frantically wondering what are the new rules of this relationship with Christ, I’ve seen the same argument unfold across all areas of our lives.

Where has that line shown up?

- You feel the freedom to enjoy a glass of wine with dinner, but you know others
- You love contemporary Christian music with drums and guitars, but someone in your congregation believes only hymns are reverent.
- You’re excited to share your newfound understanding of biblical freedom, but someone from a different background feels uncomfortable.

How do you navigate these situations?

As we dive into unpacking one of the biggest topics, dare I say arguments, that Christians live out - I encourage you to approach with an open mind and begin with these thoughts:

- Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you felt the freedom to do something but hesitated because of how others might perceive it?
- How have you seen tension in the church between those who embrace freedom and those who struggle with it?
- How does Paul’s call for **unity** challenge your natural response to Christian liberty?

Day 1 and Day 2

Read Romans Chapter 14 1:9

The early church was a diverse group of believers from different backgrounds—Jews who followed strict dietary laws and Gentiles (non - Jews) who didn't. It's important to understand the context here of WHY the Jewish people had dietary restrictions. There was a time when within the Jewish religious texts (The Torah), God laid out which meats were “clean” and which meats were “unclean” for a Jewish person to eat. Very logically, there were certain foods such as shellfish or pork that lead to more illness and disease. In physical protection of His people, God laid out these laws. In spiritual protection of His people, God also used these dietary restrictions as a way to separate or set apart the Jews from the culture around them; specifically the cultures who were prone to eating anything they wanted and using sacrifice of foods in their worship to idols (fake gods). In this way we see God intentionally setting the Jews apart, and the Jewish people responding in obedience.

You can see how this would be difficult to encounter then, when all the rules Jewish people had ever known in regards to the foods being eaten were not regarded gentile populations as they sat down to eat a meal together! Within the early church, this led to tension over non-essential issues. Paul addresses this conflict but also the underlying tension in Romans 14:1-4.

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. **2** One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. **3** 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. **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.

Day 1 QUESTIONS

1.) The Jewish distinction between **clean and unclean meats** comes from God's laws given in the Old Testament, primarily in **Leviticus 11** and **Deuteronomy 14**. These dietary laws, known as **kashrut**, set the foundation for what animals were considered permissible (**clean**) and which were forbidden (**unclean**) for the Israelites to eat.

Why was it important for the Jewish people to be “set apart”, specifically in the time before Jesus was on earth?

2.) In observing your own life and walking with Christ, do you believe that Christians are meant to be “set apart” in the same way the Jewish people were? Why or why not?

3.) What does it mean to “accept” someone whose faith is weak?

4.) Paul refers to “disputable matters.” What are some non-essential issues that cause division in the church today?

5.) Have you ever judged someone based on personal convictions rather than biblical truth? How did that impact your relationship?

DAY 2 QUESTIONS

“One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.”

Paul’s message is clear: **if God has accepted someone, who are we to reject them?** Instead of seeing people through the lens of rules and personal preferences, we should see them through God’s grace. This is sometimes easier to say than to do so often though!

1.) Why do we often feel the need to defend our personal convictions or judge those who don’t share them?

2.) What does it mean that **God has accepted them?** How does this change how we view other believers?

3.) If Jesus is the one who sustains and strengthens believers, what role should we play in each other’s faith journeys? (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**)

PERSONAL REFLECTION: In thinking about the sermon this last weekend, Pastor Chris stated that Christians tend to fall on one side or the other on this argument about how we should be living our lives.

- **Group 1:** God is love, all is love, eat, drink, and be merry because JESUS paid for it all! Complete freedom without regard.
- **Group 2:** I love JESUS, but I also have always believed we are supposed to live a certain way.

Where have you tended to fall within these groups? What are the strengths in each but also where do you find your pitfalls?

APPLICATION: If Jesus is the one who sustains and strengthens believers, what role should we play in each other’s faith journeys? (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**) This week how can you find a way to apply this encouragement to a fellow believer?

DAY 3 AND 4: The Great Dishwasher Debate

READ Romans Chapter 14:10-18

Marriage has a funny way of teaching lessons you never signed up for. Like how to compromise. Or how to load a dishwasher *the right way*.

For years, I was perfectly content leaving dishes in the sink overnight. Sometimes I got to them in the morning, sometimes... other things took priority. My husband, however, found peace in a spotless kitchen. So, in an effort to show love, I started loading the dishwasher at night. That seemed like progress—until I realized there was a *proper* way to load it. Plates facing *this* direction, cups positioned *just so*. The very thing I was doing to help somehow wasn't *right*—and, if I'm honest, that frustrated me. So, I stopped trying.

It's interesting how easy it is to give up when love starts to feel inconvenient. When our best efforts aren't appreciated, or when someone else's preferences challenge our own. But over time, I realized that this wasn't about dishes—it was about care. My husband wasn't nitpicking; he was searching for peace in the same way I search for connection at the end of a long day. And isn't that what we all want? Peace. Joy. To feel seen and valued in the ways that matter to us.

Romans 14 reminds us that life isn't about proving who's right in the little things, but about creating a space where righteousness, peace, and joy can thrive. It's about learning when to yield, when to listen, and when love is more important than getting our way.

So, maybe the real question isn't *Who's right?* but *What does love require of me today?*

As you dive in, don't forget our previous studies of our life being a "living sacrifice" or an "act of worship"

DAY 3 QUESTIONS

- 1.) What does it mean that we will all stand before **God's judgment seat**? How should this affect how we treat one another?
- 2.) How does this relate to what Jesus stated in **Matthew 7:1-5**?
- 3.) Instead of judging, Paul states "*Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.*" -
- 4.) What are some modern stumbling blocks that could hurt another believer's faith?
- 5.) How does **1 Corinthians 8:9-13** help us understand Christian liberty?

DAY 4 QUESTIONS -The Kingdom of God is Bigger Than Our Personal Preferences

- 1.) What does Paul mean when he says the Kingdom of God is not about food and drink? Why is this important to us as Christians, when we explore these matters?
- 2.) How does **Matthew 6:33** help us refocus on what truly matters?
- 3.) How can we be known for **righteousness, peace, and joy** rather than arguing over small issues? How does this correlate to being "set apart" according to John 13:35?

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Have you ever let personal convictions get in the way of loving others either inside or outside of the church? How have you handled those differences in the past? How can you switch your mindset to be focused on “building peace” rather than “being right”?

APPLICATION: What is an area of your life that while you have personal freedom, that you find yourself sacrificing that freedom in order to not be a “stumbling block” for a fellow believer? What can you do this week to build up a fellow believer and let go of judgement?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to focus on what truly matters—Your Kingdom. Teach me to love others more than my personal preferences and to pursue righteousness, peace, and joy in my relationships. May my actions reflect Your grace, and may I be a builder of unity, not division. Amen.

DAY 5 and 6

Read Romans Chapter 14 18:23

DAY 5 Questions

- 1.) What does it mean to **keep personal convictions between yourself and God**?
- 2.) How do you, personally discern whether your **convictions** align with **faith in Christ**?
- 3.) What does Paul mean when he says, *“everything that does not come from faith is sin”*? How does this align with the difference between God's righteousness and self righteousness?

DAY 6 QUESTIONS

- 1.) How does what God calls us to -living in unity, caring for each other, and being willing to sacrifice our own personal preferences for each other - how is that counter intuitive to what western culture states?
- 2.) In coming back to the beginning of Romans study - that we are saved by grace and grace alone - not by works so that no one may boast of themselves - how does that link to what you've studied this week? How are you challenged or encouraged?

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Paul says that all of our convictions we should hold up to God to examine. What part of your mindsets or choices you make for your life have been held up for God to examine? Where has He convicted you personally? Where has He set you free?

APPLICATION: What does it look like logically to have healthy discourse in the church about differences and still walk in love with each other?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to focus on what truly matters—loving You and loving others. Give me the wisdom to navigate my personal freedoms in a way that builds others up, not tears them down. May I walk in faith, peace, and love, bringing unity to the body of Christ. Amen.