



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
www.anchoredminot.com



The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Romans 14:1-12

In chapter 14, the Apostle Paul encourages the Roman Christians and how they are to relate to one another. He encourages them not to disdain or judge one another. That is to say, Paul is addressing how to deal with conflicts over piety. The kind of piety, though, is not over clear black-and-white issues. Paul is speaking to how the Christians in Rome should relate to each other concerning things that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word.

Here is how all this works. An issue arises in the church that is neither commanded nor forbidden in God's word. The issue is what we call an 'adiaphora.' (*The key to keep in mind is that whatever the adiaphora is, there is no clear command from Scripture pertaining to it. The color of the church carpet, the time of the church service, how many times one should pray a day, what missions a church should give to, where a person should live, etc., are all examples of adiaphora.*) Now, what happens is that there will be some individuals who are weak in the faith. These individuals are the kinds of people who immediately raise concerns and become quite bothered in their conscience. Because of their weak faith, these individuals will shuffle in their seats and scrunch their face when certain issues come forth. And because they are weak in the faith, they will become legalistic and judge everyone

and anybody who supports the issue that they are struggling with. For the sake of simplicity, let us say that a person who is weak in faith struggles with the color yellow. Because they are weak in faith, they will impose their judgment on anybody else who wears yellow or likes yellow, even though liking yellow is not a sin. It isn't wrong that they are weak in the faith concerning yellow, but they do sin when they judge another Christian as being wrong for liking yellow when it is an issue of adiaphora.

On the other hand, those who are strong in the faith have no concerns with the color yellow. They know that wearing yellow is not a sin but an adiaphora. And so they are entirely free in the Gospel to wear yellow and enjoy yellow. But keep in mind, that these individuals move to sin when they begin to despise and apathetically hate those who are weak in the faith – when they despise individuals who do not like yellow.

Both judging and despising one another concerning issues of adiaphora is sin. Too much useless conflict arises in the church and among Christians over issues that are neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture. Judging and despising one another has no place in the church with respect to adiaphora.

With all of this said, we must keep in mind that those who are strong in the faith must be gracious to those who are weak in the faith. Those who are strong in the faith should be gentle and cautious towards those who are young in the Christian faith and not able to grasp the meaning of freedom given in the Gospel. The command of love seeks not to harm those who are weak in faith but to serve them and be gracious to them as they become more fully instructed in the faith.

But what about those who are weak in the faith? Serious damage has been done when not discerning the difference between those who are weak in the faith and those who are legalistic in the faith. There is a tremendous difference between the two. Way too often, the church makes accommodations for individuals who they believe to be weak in the faith when, in reality, they are inflexible death rule keepers – legalists.

So how is the church to respond to those who are weak in the faith and those who are legalistic in the faith? In Acts 16:3, the Apostle Paul insisted on Timothy being circumcised; however, in Galatians 2:15, the Apostle Paul insisted on Titus 'not' being circumcised. In other words, we always make accommodations to those who are weak in the faith as not to damage or hinder their weak faith (i.e., Timothy being circumcised). However, when dealing with legalists who have no faith but stubbornly insisted on their agendas as a way to have a right relationship with God, well... we do the exact opposite of what they insist. In fact, Martin Luther says that we should feel free to boldly do things that legalists believe to be the greatest of sins to shock them out of their ungodly views. Again, this is only with respect to issues of adiaphora (that which is not commanded or forbidden by scriptures).

But this brings up an important question for us to consider. How do we discern the difference between those who are weak in the faith and those who are legalistic in the faith? It is quite simple. Those who are weak in the faith, struggle in their conscience over certain adiaphoras. And those who are legalistic? Well, they typically are the ones busy imposing certain adiaphoras. And so, when an adiaphora is challenged, those weak in the faith typically get sad, whereas those who are legalistic in the faith typically get mad. Therefore, those who are weak in the faith typically need the Gospel, and those who are legalistic in the faith typically need the law.

In conclusion, this entire subject changes when dealing with issues that are commanded and forbidden in God's Word (i.e., the Ten Commandments). For with God's Word, we are dealing with issues of repentance and faith.



