

# Romans 14: Disputable matters

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning and a warm welcome to the service this morning. It's good for us once more to be able to come together and to worship God in this way as we tune in, as we listen in the telephone.

It's good for us to come together in worship. Intimations, nothing much to note other than to encourage you to tune in this evening. The evening service will be online just before six and the prayer meeting will be on at half past seven on Wednesday on Zoom and the YF meet as usual this evening on Zoom at half past seven. We'll begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise and we'll sing that hymn, What Can Wash Away My Sin? Nothing But The Blood Of Jesus.

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh, precious is the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. No other thing I know. Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can I say? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the blood of Jesus.

[ 2 : 1 8 ] Oh, precious is the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the blood of Jesus. Oh. I love nothing but the blood of Jesus. Holy is the blood of Jesus. If it isn't, I sorry. I mean, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh, dear, nothing but the blood of Jesus. ■■■ ■■■■■ is the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the blood of Jesus. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. armies than oil LISA. can for sin at all, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nought of good that I have done, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is all my hope and peace, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

This is all my righteousness, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

[ 3 : 5 6 ] No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Now by this I'll overcome, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Now by this I'll call my home, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Let's unite to our hearts in prayer now.

Let's pray together. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day and we thank you that once more we're able to come into your presence.

[ 5 : 29 ] We're able to join our hearts together in worship. We come, Lord, this morning acknowledging that we are sinners and we know that our sin holds us back from you.

But we thank you that the words of the hymn that we sang are words that bring such encouragement and such gospel light into our lives and our hearts. We thank you that as we confess our sin, you're the God who has promised to cleanse us from all sin and purify us from all unrighteousness through the shed blood of Jesus.

What can wash away my sin?

We thank you that his blood is able to cleanse us from all sin. And we thank you, Lord, that as we confess our sin, we can have the assurance, the assurance that your word gives to us that we are forgiven, that we are made clean and that we are able to draw near to the Holy God, knowing that we will be received and find blessing because of all that has been done for us in Christ.

Help us never to grow familiar in these things and take these truths for granted. May we never lose the wonder of the cross, but may we live our lives in thankfulness for all that has been done for us and the grace shown to us in Christ.

[ 7 : 22 ] Help us, Lord, as we seek to live our lives here in this world, to do so in such a way as we'll bring glory to your name. Help us, Lord, we pray, to take every opportunity that you give to us to share the good news about Jesus that has been shared with us, with those who are around us.

And we ask, Lord, for any in our community, any in our friends, any in our friends, any in our friends, groups that come to our minds just now, that do not know, that do not understand the gospel message.

Help us, we pray, to share with them something of the good news of Jesus and to show out in the way that we live, transformed lives, something of the love and the grace of Jesus.

We thank you, Lord, that we are able to come to you and to seek your help. And we pray for that help. We pray for that protection as we continue to navigate through a strange time.

We read of reports of the virus re-emerging in different places. We hear of the cases in schools in Inverness where teachers and pupils have been sent home with the virus.

[ 8 : 38 ] And we pray, Lord, that you would drive it back. We thank you for the protection that we've known here. And we pray on, Lord, that you would protect us and guard us. And those who are struggling with the virus at this time, we ask, Lord, that you would help them.

And especially those that are in our minds, we pray, Lord, that you would help them, that you would lay your hands of healing upon them. And we thank you, Lord, for those that we've prayed for in the past who have done so well.

We think of the care home in Port Tree and Donnie McKinnon, who we prayed for for so long. We thank you that he's made a recovery from the virus. And we pray your blessing to be upon him and all who are in that home.

And we pray for Harris House. We pray for Leverborough as well and all those who are in these homes. We pray for Harris House in particular, as both Peggy and Shona have stopped working there and are moving on to doing different things.

We ask, Lord, that you would give wisdom to those who make decisions about staff in Harris House. And we thank you for the opportunities that we have there to go in and to share the gospel.

[ 9 : 50 ] And we pray that these would continue. And we ask, Lord, that your presence would be known in that place. We pray for those who are struggling in the congregation at this time.

We pray on for Elaine. Having come back from hospital, we ask that you would speed her recovery. We pray, Lord, for Teresa Gillis from Stockinish. And we ask, Lord, that as she struggles at this time in hospital, that she would know your help and that she would know your presence.

We pray on for Ian Davidson and Shona. As Ian continues to receive treatment, we pray that it would be effective. And we pray that he and Shona would both know that you are God and that you are close to them at all times.

We pray for those who are grieving. We think especially of Duncan and his family. Having lost Duncan's brother, John. We pray, Lord, for your comfort for John's wife, Jennifer, and stepdaughter, Julie.

And, Lord, for all of the family. We ask that they would know your peace and that they would be upheld and steadied through this time. May they know that you are the God of all comfort and that you are close to them.

[ 11 : 05 ] So hear our prayers. Help us, Lord, in our need. We continue to pray for those in authority over us as you've called us to. We ask, Lord, that you would give to them wisdom.

And we pray that as a country who have drifted far from you, we pray, Lord, that you would give to us that spirit of repentance. And we ask that you would draw us back close to yourself.

So hear our prayers. Help us as we open your word. And we pray, not just for ourselves, but for every congregation, whether meeting physically or whether meeting online.

We pray that you would draw near to each fellowship of your people, that you would add your blessing as your word is opened, and that you would build your church.

So hear our prayers. Go before us, we pray. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Morning, boys and girls. It's good to know that you're behind that camera again today.

[ 12 : 02 ] I wish you were in here, but you can't come in here quite yet. It seems like a long time since we've been in the church. We've had lockdown now for, well, we've not been able to come into the church for, what, three months?

Maybe a bit over three months. And now things are changing a wee bit. You're not quite as locked down as we were before. You're back in school, which is good news, I think.

But I hear from the school that there's lots of rules, isn't there? Lots of rules in the school, which you didn't have before lockdown.

The different year groups, I think they can't mix. They have play times at different times. And PE. You have to do PE outside all the time, which has been great in the good weather.

But if the rain comes down, as it probably will at some point, then it won't be quite so easy. You can use your lockers, I don't think. So you're carrying all your bags around in school.

[ 13 : 06 ] You have to go one way around the school. You can't just walk whichever direction you want to walk. You've got to wear these masks for the bus. So there's lots of rules that weren't there before.

And that's not just for yourselves. That's for everybody. Whether you're in school or whether you're out of school. There's lots of rules that we keep hearing about.

There's these masks that you have to wear. We all look a bit like robbers when we're going into the shops. We've got masks up to our noses. And there's the hand sanitiser.

A few months ago, we wouldn't really have known what this was. But now we're always scooshing our hands and rubbing our hands. And we have to stay two metres apart. And whether we're young or whether we're old, we know that there's a...

There seems to be lots of rules. And people are always telling us, and I know the rules are for good reasons. People are always telling us, keep the rules. Make sure and keep the rules.

[ 14 : 10 ] Now, boys and girls, some people think that that's what it means to be a Christian. Some people think that being a Christian and going to church and the Bible, it's all about rules.

It's all about not doing bad things. And it's all about doing good things. And some people think that heaven is the place that we go to at the end when we die.

But it's the place that we go to only if we don't break any of God's rules. Now, is that true? Is heaven a place that people go to only if they don't break any of God's rules?

Well, no, that's not true, is it? And you would tell me that if you were here. You know better than that. You know that if heaven was the place that we went to, if we never broke any of God's rules, if we never sinned, heaven would be empty.

Nobody would be there except God himself. Because we know that everybody sins. Romans 3.23, we've said it often, tells us all have sinned.

[ 15 : 20 ] We all break the rules, don't we? So how do we get into heaven? How do we become Christians? And I wish I could hear you giving me the answer because you'll be giving it to me through the screen.

The way that we get into heaven and the way that we become Christians is through Jesus. He came into this world.

He came from heaven to this world. And not only did he die for us on the cross in our place, but Jesus lived for us. Sometimes we don't think so much about that but Jesus lived for us.

He lived a perfect life. He lived the perfect life that we could never live. He never sinned. Not ever. Not once.

Not in the things that he said. Not in the things that he did. Not even in the things that he thought. He never sinned. He kept all of God's rules all the time.

[ 16 : 27 ] And he promises that if we believe in him that he will give his righteousness, his rightness, his perfect rule keeping.

He'll give that record that he earned through his perfect life and he'll give it to us. That's what we were singing about in the hymn at the beginning.

This is all my hope and peace. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is all my righteousness. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Jesus died and Jesus lived to make us right with God.

To make us righteous. So, boys and girls, let's be thankful for all that Jesus did for us that we could never do for ourselves.

Let's be thankful for the fact that he kept all the rules all the time. He lived for us. He died for us to take the punishment for all the rules that we've broken.

[ 17 : 32 ] And he rose for us from the dead. And he promises, and his promises are always true. He promises that if we trust him, he will save us from sin.

And he will take us from heaven to be with him when we die. So that's great news. And let's thank God for that now as we pray.

Lord God, we thank you for the good news about Jesus. We know that we are people who, who are, we break your rules. We sin. And the things that we do and the things that we say and the things that we think, we know that we, we often get it wrong.

We often sin. But we thank you that we have a saviour in Jesus. And we thank you that he came into this world.

And we thank you that he never sinned. He always kept your rules. We thank you that he, he went willingly to the cross to die, to pay the punishment for all the, the times that we've sinned.

[ 18 : 40 ] And we thank you that all we have to do is believe in him. And we are promised that we will not perish, that we won't die, that we won't go to hell.

But we will have everlasting life, that we will be saved, that we will go to heaven. So help us, Lord, we pray, to be trusting in Jesus and to have that hope and to have that assurance that we are safe forever.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's turn now to God's word and we'll read from Romans chapter 14. And we'll read the whole of this chapter.

Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man whose faith is weak eats only vegetables.

The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not. And the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant?

[ 19 : 45 ] To his own master he stands or falls, and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another.

Another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God.

And he who abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone, and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to 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.

You then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written, As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me, every tongue will confess to God.

[ 20 : 51 ] So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself, but if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer eating in love.

You are no longer acting in love. Do not, by your eating, destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. 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. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

[ 22 : 08 ] So whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves, but the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats because his eating is not from faith.

And everything that does not come from faith is sin. Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. We'll pray for a moment.

Lord God, we thank you for this letter that was inspired by the Holy Spirit and came through Paul to the Romans. And although it was written for a place far from us in an age very different to our age, we thank you that your word is relevant to all people at all times.

and so we ask, Lord, that you would give to us understanding and we pray that you would apply the truth of this passage to us in the power of your Spirit.

Help us to hear what you are saying to us and help us having heard to act in obedience to what you call us to. And we ask all this in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake.

[ 23 : 17 ] Amen. Sometimes you may be given a gift at birthday or Christmas or whatever and the gift that you receive, you receive it gratefully and politely but as you take it in your hands you realise you'll probably never use this.

For example, a set of drills. It's a good gift and it's an excellent gift in the right hands but if I think about myself all I could really do with a set of drills is damage.

I'm just useless at DIY so although I would say thank you for the set of drills I know that probably is best I would never use them. Or sometimes we find an expert in a field will come and start speaking to us about something that grips them and they start to share some of their expert advice you know maybe on how to fish or how to improve your golf swing and you listen politely and you nod and smile but if you don't like fishing and if you don't play golf then you know that the advice that you're hearing and receiving you'll never actually use or need.

Now in Romans 14 Paul is giving the Roman believers and he's giving us some advice he's giving us some tools that can be used and we should be ready to pick up and listen to Paul's advice we should be ready to receive and to use the tools that Paul will hand over because we're going to need them.

You know we might be able to say of the drill set or of the advice concerning fishing or golf I'll never need that we might be able to dismiss that and kind of set it to one side but we can't say that of Romans 14 we need the advice that Paul is going to give we need the tools that Paul will hand over because the advice that Paul gives us and the tools that he passes over are tools that are to be used and advice that will come into its own when Christians disagree and sadly as we all know Christians do disagree so this is a chapter that helps us to manage disagreements it's part of what it looks like to live the transformed life from Romans chapter 12 and verse 2 Paul has been he's been painting a picture of the transformed life and how it changes all our relationships our relationships with other believers our relationships with the world our relationships with the state the government

[ 26 : 05 ] Romans 13 and now in Romans 14 Paul he begins to work out what the transformed life looks like in relationships where things become strained and where there are struggles and potential disputes so this is a chapter that helps us to manage disagreements and the first thing the first point that I want to highlight here is that we need to be realistic be realistic is point number one I think it was a week last Saturday Josh who leads the singing here most weeks and his boys Joseph and Edward and I we went out for a walk we decided that we would go out for a walk at the back of the house up the hill and on that day that we set off it was hot and the ground the terrain up the back of the house is quite hard walking and as we headed out the door

Mary said to us take some water with you and maybe take a snack and I quickly replied nah we won't need any of that we're just going out for a wee while and it's not too taxing a walk we won't need any water we won't need any supplies but two hours later we were on the top of a hill and we were tired and we were thirsty and we were flagging and although I perhaps didn't admit it the second I went back to the house I need to say it wasn't realistic of me to set out on that hike without these supplies now as we set out or carry on on our Christian journey it's not realistic to assume that we'll never have points on which we disagree and Paul in verse one he makes mention of disputable matters and he's not saying in verse one that it's wrong and there should not ever be disputable matters

I think what he's saying is this is just the way it's going to be we are fallen human beings we struggle with sin and so we will find that sometimes there will be disputable matters and we need to learn to manage them in a way that will not bring dishonor to the name of Jesus now we might want to ask the question even at this early point does that mean that anything goes does that mean that anything and everything is in the category of disputable matters can we dispute and debate any and all issues and the answer to that is very clearly given already even in Romans it doesn't mean that at all where the Bible is clear on a point where God has commanded something we don't enter into dispute over that with God or with each other we don't set up a committee to debate these things we just do what God says where it's made clear we obey

Oliot the commentator helpfully writes this he says while telling us how a Christian should behave in society Paul quoted several of the ten commandments these teach us that certain things are wrong in and of themselves nobody has any right to do any of them at any time these are always wrong and they are wrong for all people such things do not present any problem for a Christian as far as deciding what is right and wrong is concerned anything God's word forbids either directly or by clear principle is not to be done there can be no disagreement among Christians here where scripture gives clear directions the difficulties says Oliot arise in those non-forbidden areas where Christians have differences of conscience so what were these issues of conscience in Rome what was it that was causing these tensions in this fellowship well generally the two areas of tension concerned diets and days diets meaning what was right for a Christian to eat what types of meat were permissible whether meat that had been previously offered to idols before it was sold could then be eaten and in the issue of days it concerned the observance of religious festivals some Jews still held to and observed the Old

Testament feast days and others wrestled with how they could rightly use Saturday and spend their time on Saturdays it had been their Sabbath and that had been such a big part of their week and now that they are Christians and the Sabbath no longer applies on the Saturday they were struggling to know how to handle that day so there was disputes over days and there were disputes over diets and there was two camps Paul identifies these camps as the weak and the strong the strong were those who lost no sleep over diets and days they weren't hung up on these issues they didn't have any great scruples about what they ate they didn't lose sleep over how they spent their Saturdays they were secure in gospel grace and Paul says that he was in that camp and then there was the weak who although they were believers they struggled to break free from these old

[ 31 : 54 ] Jewish traditions they'd never eaten some kind of meats before and they weren't going to start now they'd never played football or gone out for a picnic on a Saturday and they weren't going to start now they didn't feel at ease moving away from these traditions they were struggling to disentangle themselves from legalism and they were in danger actually of losing focus on the gospel and that's what made them weak so there were tensions in Rome between the weak and the strong there were disputable matters of diets and days and so Paul as the Holy Spirit inspires him he says to the Roman believers let's not brush these things under the carpet let's not pretend that these things don't happen let's just be realistic about the fact that there are disputable matters and we need to try and manage them well so the first point is that we are to be realistic about the fact that we will sometimes have disputable matters in our

Christian lives and experience the second point here is that we are to be accepting verse 1 to 3 accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters one man's faith allows him to eat everything but another man whose faith is weak eats only vegetables the man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does for God has accepted him I remember when I think back to Locke Aaron days hearing about an old elder he was an austere old fellow from a past generation but he was very much still remembered he was known for on Sundays going out and doing battle with people who went for walks he would scold him and send them back inside and if people turned up to church and closed that he didn't deem to be smart enough he would have plenty to say in terms of giving them a word of warning he was known for that very legalistic in his outlook and

I met so many people who remembered him and who spoke of him but as they spoke of him they were so scathing of his views and the irony was that they were less tolerant and less accepting of him than he actually was of them and that's actually what Paul is warning of here Paul is saying to the Romans there are some people who are more legalistic than you may be and certainly than I am says Paul they won't eat the meat that you and I eat they have more religious dates in I have but Paul says even though they're different and we have differences on these areas of diets and days he says don't hold them at a distance but accept them why well because God has accepted them says Paul so why do you think that you have a right to stand aloof and at a distance from him so we have to be accepting so

Paul is teaching and the Greek word that's used here for accepting it doesn't doesn't mean that kind of grudging conditional acceptance but it's a full acceptance it's a genuine warm acceptance John Stott says it means to welcome into one's fellowship and into one's heart it implies the warmth and kindness of genuine love and so Paul is saying that's what you need to show to the people who may have different views to you on these disputable matters you need to show warmth welcome you need to be accepting of them you know it's always a danger in the church that you gather people around you who think just like you and then you hold at a distance the people who differ from you and if we do that if that's our default position if that's how we handle people who we struggle with we don't manage disputes we magnify disputes but in order to manage disputable matters in order to be the church that

God calls us to be whether we're in Rome or whether we're in Tarbert we need to be accepting of each other so when we're back together in this little room and we're having a cup of coffee let's remember that and let's not go to the same people every week the people who are like us let's not go into the church meetings and always look for the people who are on the same page that we're on and form cliques go to the people who are different to you go to the people who you may struggle a little with it's what Paul is teaching he's teaching that we're to be accepting of each other so we're to be realistic point number one but the fact that there will be disputable matters but we're to be accepting of each other even in the areas of these disputes the third thing here is we're to be non-judgmental there's a story told about little children who were sitting in the living room during family worship and as usual the bible was read and prayers were said and at the end of the prayer as the family worship came to an end one little girl pipes up to her dad and she says dad my sister she had her eyes open during that prayer and the dad says that's very interesting she had her eyes open during the prayer yes she had her eyes open the whole time during the prayer dad says that's very interesting but tell me how did you know that and the little girl who just called out her sister she grimaced as she realised that she just landed herself in it but she thought quick her dad said did you have your eyes open too and she had a response ready she says well



[ 38 : 56 ] I didn't have my eyes open I just had one eye open just for a wee bit of time and whether we're in the family or whether we're in the church family we're good at calling each other out aren't we we're always trying to fix each other and Paul is teaching here we're to resist that verse 4 who are you to judge someone else's servant to his own master he stands or falls and he will stand for the Lord is able to make him stand now I wonder if Paul in writing these verses was actually reading the mind of some people in Rome they hear the last point they hear this exhortation as the chapter begins to be accepting and with resolve they look at each other and they say well yes we should be more accepting perhaps than we are

I really should try to spend some more time with these narrow minded traditionalists with all their fuss about diet and days I know I should put more effort and I should try to spend a bit more time with them maybe if I give them more time maybe if I enter into conversations with them I'll be able to get them round to my way of thinking to the person who says that Paul says or God says to Paul you don't accept someone in order to fix them if there's a fixing work to be done it's the Lord's work not yours you are to be non-judgmental in your acceptance of your brother when you disagree and we've all been there haven't we you know you get a phone call from someone you've struggled with in the past or perhaps in the present and they're asking you to go for a coffee and so you think about it and then you go and you're not two minutes in the house before they're on their high horse and they're trying to sort you out and Paul is saying to us don't be like that you're to be accepting of your brothers and sisters in

Christ don't judge them as if you were their master the Lord is their master not you and if they need sorting out on some issues you can trust the Lord says Paul to do the sorting out he's much better at sorting out people than you and I are so we're to be non-judgmental we're to be always remembering that the Lord is the judge not you and I and that's emphasized further in verses 9 to 13 for this very reason Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living you then why do you judge your brother or why do you look down on your brother for we will all stand before God's judgment seat it is written as surely as I live says the Lord every knee will bow every tongue will confess to God so then each of us will give an account of himself to God therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another so in managing disputes and disputable matters we're to be realistic about the fact they exist we're to be accepting of each other we're to be non judgmental when it comes to each other and the fourth thing here is we're to be close to the

Lord and Paul keeps taking us back to this over and over again that the transformed person the transformed life is a life that is lived close to the Lord verse 5 one man considers one day more sacred than another another man considers every day alike each one should be fully convinced in his own mind he who regards one day as special does so to the Lord he who eats meat eats to the Lord for he gives thanks to God and he who abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God for none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone if we live we live to the Lord and if we die we die to the Lord so whether we live or die we belong to the Lord you see the emphasis there he's taking us back over and over again to our relationship to the

Lord we often speak to our children about the dangers of peer pressure the danger of being taken down a stream where we end up doing things and going places just simply because everyone else is doing it the dangers of peer pressure you know peer pressure can sometimes come into the church sometimes Christians sometimes even whole church fellowships can find that they are constantly that we are constantly looking over our shoulders and we're wondering what people think of us if we do this and we're wondering what people will think of us if we don't do that and Paul is teaching here don't be looking over your shoulder all the time be looking to the Lord if we want to be fully convinced of how we should live verse 6 if we want to go through life with a settled clear conscience if we want to be steady people and not erratic people who are always reacting to those who are around us and Paul says we'll need to stay close to the

[ 45 : 16 ] Lord that's the emphasis here so many times in these few verses from verse 5 to verse 8 he's using that phrase to the Lord he's bringing us back to that primary transformative relationship it's a relationship with it's a relationship to the Lord Tim Keller in his commentary says the Christian must look at any practice and say can I do this before Christ can I do it with an eye upon him can I do it in his name thanking him for it we do not live for or to ourselves but as a people who have a Lord whom we aim to please we belong to the Lord and if we neglect our relationship with God if we allow ourselves through spiritual indiscipline to drift from him we'll find invariably that we are more in dispute with one another but if we nurture that relationship with the

Lord if we determine that we will stay close to the Lord we will find that one of the things that flows from that is that we will have greater unity because we're all looking in the same direction we're all looking to the same Lord we're all listening with his word open for that direction that he gives so we are to be close to the Lord it's the fourth point the fifth point is we're to be a stepping stone and not a stumbling block that's a phrase that I borrowed you see the stumbling block used in the passage itself I think it was Eric Alexander who said we're to be stepping stones not stumbling blocks so just borrowing his phrase there verse 13 make up your mind not to be any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way as one who is in the

Lord Jesus I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself but if anyone regards something as unclean then for him it is unclean if your brother is distressed because of what you eat you are no longer acting in a friend of mine was driving home from work a couple of weeks ago and there was a lorry in front of him he was on a motorway and something I think was a part of the lorry it came loose and it got it wasn't attached to the lorry anymore it flew onto the main carriageway and he swerved to try and avoid it but it hit him and it lodged itself under the car and it did a lot of damage to the car thankfully he was fine but the car wasn't fine but the lorry driver drove on he didn't even notice he was totally unaware of the damage that he caused because of what had fallen off his wagon now sometimes there can be things in our lives and they're not necessarily sinful for us but they prove to be a stumbling block something that can be damaging for someone else

I suppose the most obvious example would be alcohol the Bible doesn't prohibit us drinking wine to get drunk is clearly wrong it's against God's word but wine in moderation is something which is permitted but for some people there's a weakness there so for example you're out for dinner the person beside you has a problem with alcohol what do you do do you say to that person well you may have a problem but I'm free to do whatever I want the Bible allows me to have the liberty to eat what I want and drink what I want so I'm going to have my glass of wine no you wouldn't do that surely that would be totally insensitive and inconsiderate you would you would make up your mind not to be a stumbling block so you have a coke or you have a glass of water that would be the Christ like thing to do but to make up our minds to be a stepping stone something that will bring spiritual progress into the life of another and not a stumbling block

I remember a lady in the congregation over in Skye when dad was a minister there Mary Morag Stuart was her name she had connections with South Harris and she was a beautiful Gaelic singer she was a mod gold medalist if I remember rightly but after she was converted after she came to know Jesus she stopped going to the mod now we can sensibly ask the question why did she do that is it sinful to go to the mod and the answer to that question is no it's not sinful to go to the mod but for her it was a stumbling block wouldn't be for me I don't think but for her it was a stumbling block it took her back into ways and groups and patterns of behaviour that were not helpful in her walk with God I know guys who have stopped playing football for a period is that because football is sinful no football is not sinful but for them it had become an idol it was a stumbling block and so they hung up their boots for a season or two and for some in

[ 51 : 31 ] Rome it was what they ate that gave them a bad conscience and so Paul says even though what you eat is of no great consequence in Paul's mind and in the minds of many even though eating certain foods is not sinful in itself if it causes distress if it gives your brother a bad conscience don't eat it when you're with your brother don't be a stumbling block don't be one who will cause your brother to trip up and be hurt and be discouraged but rather be considerate be loving towards him be someone who is a stepping stone to his spiritual progress so that's point number five we're to be a stepping stone and not a stumbling block to each other and the final point is that we are to be living sacrifices we're to be willing to sacrifice our rights for Jesus sake and my time is gone but that's the gist of things from verse 16 down to the end

Paul is saying yes in the gospel you're free you're free to eat what you want you're free to drink what you want you're free to go to the mod if you want you're free to play football for Harris if you're selected you're free the gospel brings you great freedom but if says Paul the exercise of your freedom is going to cause someone else a brother or sister to stumble and fall then be willing to sacrifice your freedom be willing to forgo your perceived rights for Jesus sake or in other words Paul is saying think beyond yourself live sacrificially and if that seems too costly if we're struggling to find the motivation to do that where do we go to get proper perspective well we go to the cross

Philippians chapter 2 if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ if any comfort from his love if any fellowship with his spirit if any tenderness and compassion then make my joy complete by being like-minded having the same love being one in spirit and purpose do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others better than yourselves each of you should look not only to your own interest but also to the interests of others your attitude should be the same as that as of Christ Jesus who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the form of a servant being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross see as we've said before we must not we cannot drift any distance from the cross our whole outlook and our behaviour and our lifestyle will start to break down it's as we see the cross it's as we revisit the cross that we see that for our salvation he

Jesus who was in very nature God he made himself nothing he emptied himself he gave up his rights he sacrificed himself for us so think on that says Paul as you consider each other and when we do think on that when we have the attitude of Christ Jesus in us and shared amongst us then even our disputes can be used by God not to drive us apart but to bring us closer together not to bring disgrace to the name of Jesus but to show out the grace of Jesus that is evident in us even when we disagree so may

God enable us to disagree to manage disputes even in a way that brings glory to his name Lord God we ask that you would indeed help us to live these transformed lives as we think about all that you have done for us in Christ as we think about the great sacrifice of your son who laid down his life for our sin we thank you Lord that as we survey that salvation that grace given to us we pray that we would live lives in response that will bring glory to your name lives which are different lives where we show forth Jesus in our relationships with other believers with the world with the government and even when we're in matters of dispute may we manage these disputes in such a way as to show the love and the grace of Jesus to each other and we ask all these things in Jesus name

[ 57 : 32 ] Amen we'll sing now to conclude from Psalm 133 and we'll sing the whole of the psalm behold how good a thing it is and how becoming well together such as brethren are in unity to dwell like precious ointment on the head that down the beard did flow even it unpeared and to the skirt did off his garments go as

Hermon's Jew the Jew that doth on Zion hills descend for there the blessing God  
command life that shall never end and now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and  
the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all both  
now and forever more Amen