

# THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

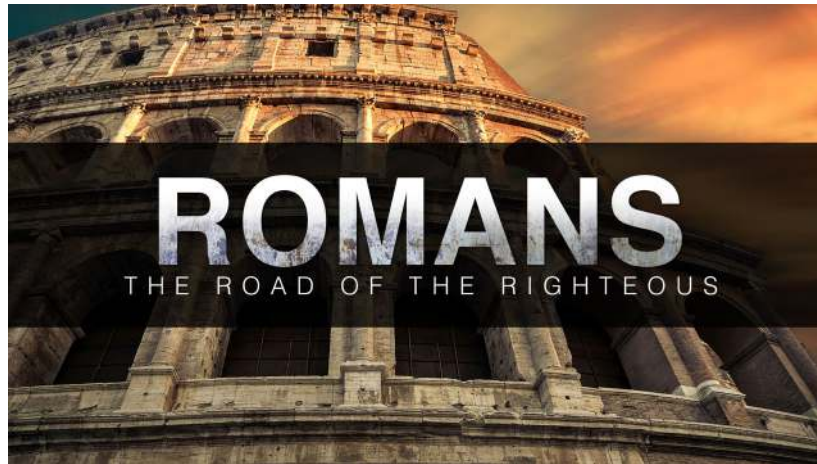
## Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 14:1-3

Written By

©Pastor Marty Baker

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**W**hat does the Lord desire for His Church? Unity. During His High Priestly prayer, He uttered prior to His crucifixion, He made this concern quite clear:

<sup>20</sup>I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me (John 17).

The unity the Trinity enjoys in its unique community is exactly what the Lord looks for in His mystical community of believers until He returns.

Does He see it in our local church? For the most part, yes. We are a mature, stable church which knows how to stay unified on the essentials and to flex on the non-essentials. No doubt, we have debated and discussed many issues and decisions over the years I have been here, and I am pleased to say I am proud of how you have worked as a body to carefully guard our unity. Because we have been on the same page in many areas, we have been able to do much to advance the kingdom of Christ, and for that I'm sure He is well-pleased.

Unity, however, has to be continually guarded for this is where the ol' Devil seeks to hamstring the work of God. Just like a wrestler will exploit the weakness of an opponent, our Adversary, who knows our mortal weaknesses and sinful propensities, continually works to pit saint against saint so leading people to Christ and growing saints to maturity is curtailed. For him, there is nothing better than believers who are divided and at odds with each other.

How does our ancient foe seek to divide God's people? There are many techniques in his bag of tricks, but one significant method involves what we would call grey areas. What is a grey

area, to use the British spelling of the phrase? The MacMillan online dictionary defines it as “a situation in which the rules are not clear, or in which you’re not sure what is right or wrong.”<sup>1</sup> What are some of those grey areas where believers might be tempted to argue and divide over?

- *Movies.* Should a Christian go to the movies? Some would say, “Sure, what’s the big deal? As long as you make sure you check out the rating and the content of the flick, you are free to enjoy cultural entertainment.” Others, like my pastor growing up, say, “A believer should *never* set foot in a movie theater, no matter how great the reclining chairs and Dolby Sound system are. My father took me to all of the James Bond movies as a kid; however, my pastor’s son, Tim, was forbidden to ever see anything like *Dr. No* (1962), *From Russia With Love* (1963), *Goldfinger* (1964), *Thunderball* (1965) and the like. Is there anything wrong with seeing the new Star Wars movie?
- *Cards.* Should believers play poker? Should they play blackjack? Can they do these things even if money is not involved? My strict Baptist church forbid cards for any type of play. I found out the hard way when my best friend, Donnie, and I were caught with a card deck on a church bus headed to winter camp. You would have thought we had smuggled illegal drugs onto the bus. We no sooner pulled the deck out than a youth leader confronted us and confiscated them.
- *Alcohol.* Can believers enjoy a glass of wine every now and then as long as they do it in moderation? Some would say, “Yeah, go ahead and enjoy that bottle of zinfandel.” Others would say, “A believer’s home should be devoid of all forms of liquor.” During my first trip to Israel, I joined our group with another church from San Diego. Our group, which had a more relaxed view of wine, ordered red wine to toast being in the Promised Land. I’ll never forget the icy stares we received from the other church group. You would have thought we were drinking multiple shots of vodka.
- *Marijuana:* If it is legalized in one State and not another, in which you live, is it permissible to have a “joint” every now and then? Some students who attend college are faced with this new legal opportunity. What can they do? What should they do? Since my father spent his whole career as a U.S. Customs officer fighting illegal drugs, you can probably guess where I stand on the issue. I have also lived long enough to see how this drug is a gateway to other more deadly drugs, and I’ve seen what it does to people in the long-term. One of my friends in Junior High started smoking pot with his buddies and by the time we were freshmen he was dead from a heroin overdose. Don’t tell me this drug doesn’t lead to other things. Yet, what used to be illegal is not legal in many places in the U.S., and because of this we have a new grey area.
- *Dancing.* Should believers ever dance? Some would say, “Dancing is fine so long as it is not suggestive.” Others would argue, “No, a believer should never step onto a dance floor because that is what non-believers do and it is sinful.”
- *Tobacco.* Should a Christian smoke? Should they vape? Can they have a choice Cuban cigar to relax? My father smoked for 53 years. He started when he was

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<sup>1</sup>MacMillian Dictionary, s.v. “grey area,” accessed January 2, 2020, <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/british/grey-area>.

- 13 and quit cold turkey after his first heart attack. As a godly Christian man, was my father wrong to smoke unfiltered Camel cigarettes all those years?
- *Cosmetics.* Is it evil for a woman to use cosmetics? If no, then is there a point when it too much? If yes, then why is it wrong?
  - *Friends.* Is it wrong to have a lot of non-Christian friends?
  - *Home Schooling.* Should believers keep their children out of the godless school system? Are believers free to decide whether their children should be educated at home or by the State?
  - *Dress.* Are believers free to dress to fit into society? Should Christian parents permit their daughters to stay up on all the modern fashion trends so they find acceptance with their friends? Should dresses be a certain length? If so, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable? Can you wear jeans to church? Should men only be in suits with ties?
  - *Tattoos.* Are believers free to get a tattoo, or two, or three? Can they get a sleeve of tats and still be in God's good graces?
  - *Piercings.* Is a nose ring acceptable for a maturing believer? How about a tongue, nose, or lip piercing?
  - *Concerts.* Should believers head to see the Doobie Brothers on Wednesday, June 24 at Jiffy Lube?
  - *Bible Translation.* Is the King James Version THE only viable Bible version? Some think so. I had a parishioner confront me as a young pastor for using the New American Standard version while preaching and teaching. To listen to him, you would have thought I was using a Hindu Veda or a Koran.
  - *Music.* Should believers only listen to Christian music? Should Chris Tomlin songs be what plays on all of your devices? Should we only sing hymns at church and should the hymns only be played as they are written, or are we free to modify them? Can believers listen to rock? How about hip hop? How about rap? If they are free to listen to what they want, are there limitations as to what believers should listen to? How do we know what those limitations are? Who devises them?

Ah, now you see what I mean by grey areas. Sad to say, churches have been destroyed and Christian friendships have been nuked over unresolved disagreements in areas where the Scriptures are not readily clear. I'm sure many of you know what I am talking about.

The church in Rome in Paul's day obviously had its share of issues in relation to grey areas. Why do I say this? This observation is based on the fact Paul focused an entire chapter on it in Romans 14. Wow. Why did he do this? Paul knew God wants unity in our diversity; however, he also knew our penchant to turn *spiritual preferences* into *spiritual principles* and to then divide and conquer with them . . . all for the sake of holiness and spirituality, of course. His former life as a highly skilled Pharisee taught him this much as well. Hence, when he heard about the Roman church compromising its Christian witness by warring over how far to observe their newfound freedom in Christ, he knew he had to address it quickly to get the church back on a track of true maturity.

What Paul told the church in Rome is as applicable today as it was then for we still struggle with how free we are in Christ as we live in a godless culture. What is Paul's main message in this entire passage? Good question. I would boil it down to this one statement:

## God Desires Unity, Not Disunity, In Life's Grey Areas (Rom. 14:1-23)

How can we go about realizing this lofty, worthy goal so there is always healthy unity in our lives and in our church? We can mature in this pivotal area by understanding and applying keys to unity which naturally emerge from Paul's teaching in this highly practical chapter. Over the next few weeks, we will methodically and systematically work our way through each one of them, and we will challenge you to leave this house of worship and put them into practice.

My analysis of Paul's teaching in the opening three verses causes me to see two distinct unity keys. First, we will read the text and then offer some salient grammatical and cultural observations before we apply it to our lives.

<sup>1</sup> Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. <sup>2</sup> One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. <sup>3</sup> The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

From verses two and three, I believe we encounter our first unity principle or key.

### Unity Key #1: Mature Saints Who Enjoy Freedom In Grey Areas Should Accept Immature Saints Who Are More Restrictive (Rom.14:1-2)

Throughout this passage, Paul speaks about strong saints versus weak saints. Who are they? Let's start where Paul started with the saint who is "weak in faith". What does this mean? Leon Morris gives us an apt definition with this statement:

As the discussion shows, he does not mean a person who trusts Christ but little, the man of feeble faith. Rather, the person he has in mind is the one who does not understand the conduct implied by faith; perhaps he is the person whose faith is ineffective. His faith is weak in that it cannot sustain him in certain kinds of conduct. He does not understand that when the meaning of justification by faith is grasped questions like the use of meat and wine and special days become irrelevant. <sup>2</sup>

R. Kent Hughes makes a similar statement:

The one "whose faith is weak" is not weak in basic Christian faith, but is weak in assurance that his faith permits him to do certain things, such as eating meat. <sup>3</sup>

William Barclay offers this helpful insight:

Such people are weak in the faith for two reasons.

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 477.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 260.

- (1) They have not yet discovered the meaning of Christian freedom; they are at heart still legalists and see Christianity as consisting of rules and regulations.
- (2) They have not yet freed themselves from a belief in the efficacy of works. In their hearts, they believe that they can gain God's favour by doing certain things and abstaining from others. Basically, they are still trying to earn a right relationship with God, and have not yet accepted the way of grace, still thinking more of what they can do for God than of what God has done for them.<sup>4</sup>

You can easily see how a Christian, be he a Jew or a Gentile, could have remained more restrictive with his Christian walk in Rome. Meats sold in the local markets were first dedicated to the gods of the Roman pantheon; hence, to partake would be to show some sort of homage to pagan worship. A conscientious and spiritually sensitive saint might then feel led to abstain from all meat and just eat vegetables for fear of "worshipping" false gods. He could easily, also, think that any saint who would dare eat meat from the markets of Rome was, then, sinning.

Jewish believers, who had their share of dietary laws in the Torah, could readily argue that since God divided between clean and unclean animals, then, they would stand with God and eat only what He said they could. Leviticus 11 is one of those chapters in the Torah which explained food laws for the nation:

<sup>44</sup> For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. <sup>45</sup> For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy. <sup>46</sup> This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters and everything that swarms on the earth, <sup>47</sup> to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten.

God did use food laws to create a distinct and chosen people, and to teach them how holiness is related to embracing the clean and shunning the unclean. He, however, never meant for the food laws to be enteral. Peter learned this much in Acts 10 where the Lord gave him a vision which encouraged him to eat whatever he wanted. Had Peter, however, shunned this vision and continued to embrace Mosaic dietary laws, he would have been classified as a saint "weak in faith," according to Paul. Why? Because he would have failed to see that Christ's death and resurrection freed him from the constraints and mandates of this part of the Law.

A weak saint, in the final analysis, is an immature saint. He is weak insofar as he does not really know how to enjoy freedom in areas which have nothing to do with holiness and sin. Based on this, he is also typically identified by the number of rules and regulations he lives his life by in order to please God. Is this you? Are you a weak saint? Do you think spirituality is all about keeping close tabs on what you can and cannot do in relation to grey areas?

A strong saint, on the other hand, is one who understands that while he is culpable and accountable to God for how he enjoys his Christian freedom, he also is permitted by God to enjoy life in areas where God has given no express commands. For him, his life is a bit looser, not morally speaking, but looser in the sense he is not all uptight about cultural issues/opportunities/offerings God did not directly speak against. He'll think, "Hey, *Aquaman* is available at Redbox. I have a

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<sup>4</sup>William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 212.

coupon so I'll think I'll rent it and have some friends over to view it after we have pizza." He'd also never think of watching *IT: Chapter Two* because, well, the content is just too brutal and gory, and he does not want his mind cluttered with this type of cultural garbage. But he wouldn't have a problem with *Jumanji: The Next Level*; however, he might when he learns that some of the characters switch gender roles when they move from the real world to the game world. In any event, he knows he is free to enjoy life, but he does it with his mind and discerning abilities fully engaged.

Are you a strong believer? Many are in our body are mature, and for that I'm grateful. It enables us to be better positioned to reach our culture because we are somewhat tied into our culture. Knowing what they are watching, reading, listening to and so forth can give us a certain degree of credibility with them so we can, in turn, hopefully speak to them to eternal things.

With all of this in mind, let us now return back to Paul's opening words in chapter 14. His counsel here is not for the weak saint but for the stronger, more mature one. What did Paul say? He counsels strong, mature believers to *fully* accept weaker, more immature ones along with their rules and regulations and more restrictive lifestyles. The Greek for "accept" is a compound word, consisting of a preposition wedded to a verb for the sake of emphasis. It is the word *prolamvano* (προσλαμβάνεσθε). Because it is an imperative in the present tense, and it is highly emphatic, Paul is giving saints a command transcending all time and cultures. Put differently, it is not a nice suggestion, but a bold, distinct line in the sand saints should seek to obey *perpetually*. Ostensibly, this does not mean strong saints should just tolerate weak ones. Paul speaks of full, loving acceptance of their restrictive ways, and all done without a spirit of argumentation:

<sup>1</sup>Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.*

This last clause highlights the importance of warmly receiving another saint who is not as free as you are in grey areas. You, conversely, should not receive them with the view of convincing them of the rightness of your viewpoint. Love demands loving acceptance, pure and simple. Thus, as Paul points out in verse 2, if you do not have an issue in a given grey area, you should joyously embrace a saint who does have an issue in the given area. Easy to say, but hard to do.

Let's unpack what happened with my tour group while in Israel years ago. When our group realized the other group had an issue with some of my group having one glass of wine with dinner, I went to their leaders with one of our leaders and asked him if the wine drinking posed a problem with them. When he said it did, we told him our group would gladly accept their position and no one would drink any more wine the rest of the time we traveled in Israel. We did not launch into a heated debate at that restaurant on the seaside of the beautiful Galilee. That would have destroyed unity and friendships with other saints. Far more important to honor the weaker brother and maintain unity and peace.

Are you in a situation where you, as a stronger saint, are destroying unity over a grey area? Acceptance is, I think, in order so peace can flood into the relationship.

A second unity key is found in verse 3.

## Unity Key #2: Check Your Attitude Where Non-Essentials Are Concerned (Rom. 14:3)

My father used to wear an interesting hat. Emblazoned across the front of it were these words: **CHECK YOURSELF**. What did it mean? According to my father, it meant you should always

check your attitude, for, after all, attitude is everything. Knowing how easy it is to have a bad attitude toward people who are acting spiritually immature probably motivated Paul to say this in verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

To those believers, Jew or Gentile, who understood that eating meat sold in the markets which had been offered to pagan gods was not sinful, Paul warns them not to ridicule those who are not as free. More precisely, Paul uses a negative here with a present tense imperative to forbid an action currently in progress. It is as if he says, “Stop ridiculing those who refrain from eating meat offered to idols,” or to put it in our vernacular, “Stop ridiculing those who are more restrictive in how they live their Christian lives. The verb here in Greek speaks of outright disdain for someone:

ἐξουθενέω (or ἐξουθενόω) laor. ἐξουθένησα; pf. pass. ἐξουθένημαι; laor. pass. ἐξουθενήθη (or ἐξουθενώθη); (1) as treating someone or something as of no account *despise, disdain, make light of* (RO 14.3); (2) as making something or someone as of no account *disregard, reject, despise* (1TH 5.20).<sup>5</sup>

Interesting. The stronger brother is warned against making light of, or making fun of the weaker brother’s tighter, more regulated life.



I did not exactly follow this command the way I should have while in high school. From 1972 to 1976, I enjoyed Led Zeppelin’s music. Who didn’t? I had many of their albums and thoroughly enjoyed listening to everything from *Black Dog* and *Whole Lotta Love* to *Stairway to Heaven* and *Ramble On*. And when I started driving, it just seemed my father’s white, four-door Datsun B210 just drove better with a Zep tune playing on the cassette deck.

Then it happened. While talking with a couple of my buddies after church one day at the bottom of the front entrance steps, a sailor named Alan overheard me talking about a new Zep album I just secured. He spun around and tore into me for listening to the Devil’s music. For every point I made in my defense, he had two or

three more designed to wrap me up in his legalistic world. I walked away feeling, I’m sure, he had done his Christian duty, and I walked away wondering what just happened to me. In my mind I was free in Christ to listen to rock . . . within reason, of course. For a long time after my encounter with Alan, I had a bad attitude about him and I avoided him too. To this day, I do not know what happened to him, but I’ll never forget the time our Christian worlds collided. While I still believe

<sup>5</sup>Timothy, Barbara Friberg’s *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2000).

I was in the right, my attitude toward Alan was not. I really did not like him so I just ignored him, and, at times, I even talked him down with my other friends. Since then, Paul's words have been burned into my mind and heart.

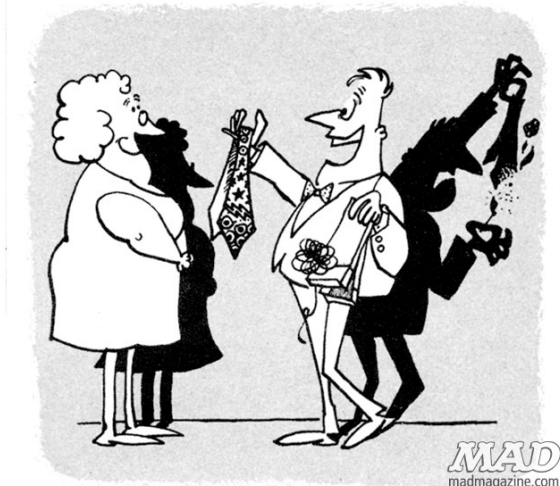
On the other side of the equation, Alan-types are warned by Paul here too. They are not supposed to judge those who are enjoying their Christian freedom in a grey area. They are not supposed to land into them like a professional boxer, hitting them with all their best arguments designed to subdue them to their viewpoint about spirituality. They are, on the other hand, commanded to stop unjustly judging (another negative with a present tense imperative forbidding an action in progress, viz., *μὴ κρινέτω*) their freer brothers and sisters in Christ. Judging naturally comes with the turf of the weaker brother because he is all about laws, rules, and regulations. Because of this reality he will tend to be highly legalistic, and will be tempted to harangue you with whether you measure up to the way he views obedience to Christ. Paul's counsel to this type of saint could not be clearer: stop judging everyone around you who does not live like you think they should in areas where there are no clear biblical mandates!

I have run into these people all of my life.

A man brought his wife and children into one of our worship services at my last church, and from the get-go he seemed aloof. When I walked over and greeted him, he told me his name and then he said, "Are those drums on the stage?" Having been raised reading *Mad Magazine*, I loved the section called *The Shadow Knows*. It showed various scenes of what people were possibly thinking. In this one panel, a man is talking about how much he likes the tie his wife gave him, while his shadow shows him lighting it on fire.



Who knows what evils lurk in the hearts of men?  
**THE SHADOW KNOWS**



Anyway, when the man asked me that question, my carnal man was tempted to give him a snappy answer, but I did not. I just looked at the legalist and said, "Yes, those are drums." Then he said, "Do you use them in worship?" Again, I was tempted to say something like, "Oh, no, there are just a set decoration." But I didn't. I told him we enjoyed using them as we worshipped. With that he smugly looked at me and said, "Well, if that is the case, my family certainly won't be worshipping here." I guess our worship was just too sinful for his righteous, law-abiding blood.

I wonder, where in Scripture does it say "Thou Shalt Not Use Drums In Worship"? It doesn't. We are free to use them, and we do. But items like drums can become that which threatens unity and peace if not addressed with Paul's commands in mind.

Since this is a new year, I think a great way to start it would be to step forward with some much needed confession.

- "Lord, forgive me for not accepting those who are legalistic in their approach to spirituality."



- “Lord, forgive me for having a bad attitude toward those who do not appreciate the freedom I feel in my faith.”
- “Lord, forgive me for arrogantly judging believers around me who don’t live like I think they should, who don’t follow rules I think are important for spiritual growth.”