



Part 1 Discussion Guide

Face the Issue:

Christians disagree. The existence of about 175 different Protestant denominations in the United States attests to this fact. This week we began a new series called “Trivial” in which we will examine some of the areas that we tend to disagree about. The reason that there is disagreement is because scripture is pretty silent about these things. Believers in Christ all agree on the foundations of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ but it’s the “gray area” things that cause division. These are the things that Jeremy labeled as being trivial.

Why do you think there has been so much dissension over how Christians should handle disagreements about “gray areas”?

Into the Word:

Should Christians fight in wars; listen to rock music; support public schools; attend R-rated movies? What do these apparently unrelated items have in common? Each is a “gray area” under debate by some Christian communities.

Read Romans 14.

Gray areas are not new. The early church at Rome was split by two controversies: arguments about diet and arguments about holy days. The “weaker” brothers favored a vegetarian diet, while the “stronger” believers boasted that any food was right to eat (Rom. 14:2). Similarly, the “weaker” brothers honored certain days more than others, while the “stronger” ones considered every day equally important or unimportant.

Today, most Christians dismiss these controversies as meaningless. Instead we have controversies over contemporary music, dress and hairstyles, the drinking of beverages containing alcohol, what movies we watch, etc.

It is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT that we understand that in these verses “weak” is not necessarily bad and “strong” is not necessarily good. These words simply refer to the maturity level of the Christian. A weak Christian becomes strong as they understand Scripture and “Grow in Christ”.

Author Ronald T. Habermas further described weak and strong in four categories. Take any of the gray areas listed above, say watching R-rated movies, and these are the believers that he said exist:

- The Mature Participant: This is the person who says, “I have a clear conscience about seeing a mixture of different movies. I believe I can make good choices while avoiding having a superior attitude toward other believers who do not share my conviction.”

- The Mature Non-Participant: This is the person who says, "I do not have a clear conscience about watching these movies. I do not trust my own self-control. However, I try not to condemn those who do watch them."
- The Immature Participant: This is the person who says, "I watch any movie that I please. The church does not have the authority to tell me what not to do. I don't care who it hurts."
- The Immature Non-Participant: This is the person who says, "I don't watch any R-rated movies. In fact, no true Christian would ever watch movies like that."

Based on Romans 14, which of the four viewpoints above are scripturally sound?

What are the dangers of the other two viewpoints?

Paul makes a very powerful statement in verse 14 that nothing is in itself unclean or impermissible. Instead he says that the "evil" is not so much in things but is in people. With that in mind, how do you interpret his saying "But it is unclean for any one who thinks it is unclean"? How does this relate to personal convictions?

Based on Romans 14, which of the following is truly a sin, an overt behavior (such as how a person dresses, what music they listen to, what they drink, etc) or having doubts in your personal convictions and performing that behavior anyway? How would you paraphrase verse 23? Can you give an example of how a behavior can be acceptable for one believer but not another?

So does Romans 14 mean there are no restrictions? No, Paul says there are two areas that we must be mindful of when we are dealing with fellow believers in these trivial gray areas.

- duties based on our relationship to God.
- duties based on our responsibility to others

What does verse 3 say about how God views people on both sides of these gray areas?

Who does verse 4 say that the people that God has accepted are responsible to? Who is responsible for helping and instructing believers in their convictions (verse 4)?

According to verse 6, why does a person have a particular belief concerning a potential gray area?

According to verses 10-12, what is to be our attitude about believers that have an alternate perspective on these possible controversial gray areas?

Apply The Word

Our mission statement is to help people to know Jesus and to grow in Him. Part of that growing is to provide ways for the Holy Spirit to strengthen people in their knowledge and discernment of personal convictions. We are not responsible to give them their convictions or to instill our personal convictions in them. Instead we are to provide a nurturing environment where God can grow and strengthen His people ("And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand."- Romans 14:4b)

Pray that God will give you a spirit of reconciliation and non-judgement so that you can be a part of this great work. If you are still struggling with your convictions, pray that God will open opportunities for you to grow.