



# **Welcome to Grace Communion International**

**September 13, 2020**

# CALL TO WORSHIP



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“1 ¶ «TO THE CHOIRMASTER. OF THE SONS OF KORAH.  
ACCORDING TO ALAMOTH. A SONG.»

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

3 though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains  
tremble at its swelling. *Selah*” (Ps 46:1-3 ESV)

God is our sure place of refuge



# SERMON

## Healthy Relationships in the Church



# SCRIPTURE READING

ROMANS 14:1-12 (ESV)

Gillian Elliott



**“1 ¶ As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.**

**2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.**

**3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.”**

**Romans 14:1-12 (ESV)**



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**“4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.**

**5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.**

**6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.”**

**Romans 14:1-12 (ESV)**



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**“7 For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.**

**8 If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.**

**9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”**

**Romans 14:1-12 (ESV)**



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**“10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;**

**11 for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”**

**12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”**

**Romans 14:1-12 (ESV)**



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**THESE ARE THE LIVING WORDS OF GOD**

**THANK YOU JESUS FOR SHOWING US HOW TO  
HAVE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITHIN YOUR  
CHURCH.**

**AMEN**



There are things in the Christian life that are very important and others which are simply questionable opinions.

How do we avoid elevating opinions to the level of requirements?

How do we live together as Christians with different views and opinions?

How do we avoid judging or condemning one another on account of opinions?

This is what we are going to consider today during the sermon as we look at Romans 14.

The one big question at the centre of all this matter is the apostle Paul addressing how Jesus, the head of the church, and God the Father view disciples at their various levels of maturity.

Some of the Bible translation translate this verse differently, but they all mean the same thing. (next slide)

**“Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions.” (Ro 14:1 NRSV)**

**“Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.” (Ro 14:1 NIVUS)**

**“Receive ye him that is weak in the faith, but not with doubtful disputations.” (Ro 14:1 KJ21)**

**“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.” (Ro 14:1 ESV)**



This chapter is addressing two very important topics:

- 1 – What are disputable matters and opinions?
- 2- Who are the weak in the faith?
- 3 Who are the strong in the faith?
- 4 How are the strong and the weak to interact with one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord?

## What Are Disputable Matters?



What disputable matters are not:

- Disputable matters are not the commandments which guide us in our Christian walk living under grace.
- For example, disputable matters are not whether adultery is right or wrong.
- Disputable matters are not whether or not envying is right or wrong.
- Disputable matters are not whether lying is right or wrong.
- Disputable matters are not whether or not killing another human being is right or wrong.
- Disputable matters are not whether or not getting drunk is right or wrong.
- Disputable matters are not whether or not Jesus is the only way to salvation.
- Disputable matters are not whether or not we can gain salvation and eternal life by

our own efforts.

- Disputable matters are not whether we ought to forgive or not.

**Disputable matters are not the central core belief of the Christian faith.**

In this context, Jews and Gentiles were living side-by-side. The Jews had been raised and inculcated with the belief that Sabbath and Holy Day observances were still important. These were indeed important under the Old Testament but not in the New Testament. This was a huge adjustment for the Jewish people who came to faith in Jesus.

They were also inculcated with the belief that eating certain foods itemized in the Old Testament was wrong.

They had not yet come to understand that in the New Testament, the observance of days or what was eaten was not important in God's eyes.

However, God is very clear that if they ate certain foods which were not from faith was sin (vs. 23).

This teaching has important ramifications for both those who are weak and those who are strong.

Given what Paul was inspired to write, how do we love and respect one another in our circumstances today?

## Who Are the Strong in the Faith?



Next slide

**“1 ¶ We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.**

**2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.**

**3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” (Ro 15:1-3 ESV)**

**Paul saw himself as strong in the faith**



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Next slide (How did Paul behave with Jews and Gentiles?)

“20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.

21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.

22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.” (1Co 9:20-23 ESV)

How did Paul behave with Jews and Gentiles?



In these verses, we see clearly that the apostle Paul was free to act differently when he was with the Jews or with gentiles. There are many things that gentiles do that are not sinful. There are many things that Jews do in their culture that are not sinful.

The apostle Paul did not make big issues of things that were just cultural or a matter of opinion.

All the apostles were chosen and sent forth by Jesus to preach and to be witnesses to him and the gospel. They pointed people to Christ and to the graciousness of God the Father who gave us his Son by the work of the Holy Spirit to free people from the oppression of sin and its accompanying darkness. They preached the good news of the kingdom of God.

**“One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.” (Ro 14:2 ESV)**

**Who are the weak in the faith?**



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## What Are Some of the Disputable Matters in the Church Today?



When thinking about the church, I think about GCI and I also think about other Christians in other denominations who have faith in Christ and the free gift of grace but who have different opinions about secondary issues, non-salvation issues.

Some of the things that come to mind are:

Whether or not to drink alcohol?

How often should communion be taken?

Whether women are allowed to preach in the church?

What is the best method of baptizing by immersion or by sprinkling?

There are books which discuss the various opinions of believers. Examples:

**Revelation: Four Views a Parallel Commentary**, edited by Steve Gregg

**FOUR VIEWS ON HELL**, Literal, Metaphorical, Purgatorial, Conditional edited by William Crockett

What all these views have in common is the acceptance that the Bible talks about everlasting punishment. Different Christians have different interpretations of what that means.

There are times in history when there has been battles fought over these opinions.

The evidence is that we have so many denominations. They all began because of different views of Christianity.

**Number of Christian Denominations (from**

<https://www.learnreligions.com/christianity-statistics-700533>)

**According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there are approximately 41,000 Christian denominations and organizations in the world today. This statistic takes into consideration cultural distinctions between denominations in different countries, so there is an overlapping of many denominations.**

The point is very clear that there are people in the church who are weak in the faith. There are people in the church who are strong in the faith. All these secondary issues present real challenges don't they?

How are we to treat one another?

This is a very important question to consider.

**“7 For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.**

**8 If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.**

**9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.” (Ro 14:7-9 ESV)**

**Important to Remember**



This is very important to remember. We do not live for ourselves. We live to the Lord.

I cannot be responsible for how others react to other people, whether weak or strong in the faith, but I can be responsible in the Lord for how I react and treat other people who have different secondary views than I have.

Individually, we will all have to bend the knee to Jesus. Every tongue will confess or shall give praise to God. Each of us will give an account of ourself to God.

We need to realize, as Paul earlier states in the book of Romans, that we are saved by the faithfulness of Christ and not by our own righteousness.

The bottom line for eternal life is my participation in the faithfulness of Jesus towards me. Salvation is not our own doing. It is all of God’s doing from A to Z. He is the one who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus’ incarnation, life, death resurrection and ascension to heaven. This truth is elaborated very strongly in both the letter to the Romans and the other letters of Paul.

The bottom line is that each of us is to show respect and love for our brothers

whatever their level of spiritual maturity maybe.

Paul knew very well that in the Lord Jesus that nothing was unclean in itself but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean (verse 14).

**He goes on to say that if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of his evil (paraphrase of verses 15–17)**

The bottom line is the following:

**“17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**

**18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.**

**19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” (Ro 14:17-19 ESV)**



**“20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.**

**21 It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. 22**

**The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.” (Ro 14:20-22 ESV)**

Even in the church, we need the wisdom, among brethren, how and when to share the faith we have.

The strong in the faith have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please self.

We are to follow the example of Christ.

All to this takes discernment. This wisdom is found in Jesus. We are to be able to discern the essentials of the faith and what are disputable matters.

**“2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.**

**3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”**

**4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Ro 15:2-4 ESV)**



Of course, the weak in the faith also have an obligation towards the strong.

**“3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.**

**4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” (Ro 14:3-4 ESV)**



Human relationships are fragile.

Recently, Edna and I were watching a movie, a comedy, about two young people who fell in love. Because they were of different tribes, the father of the bride had difficulties with her in-laws and the mother of the groom also had great difficulties with the origins of the bride's family.

Of course, this caused no end of consternation to the future couple.

The real source of the problem between the in-laws was the mother of the groom, in her younger days, had a crush on the father of the bride. The father of the bride used to own the shoe store. Being a young man, he also eyed other young girls which aroused jealousy in her. Anyway, he sold her a pair of shoes. While walking to some event, the heel of her new high heel shoes broke. The mother of groom tried to exchange the pair of shoes. He would have not of it.

As the movie went on, the two in-laws family met. The mother of groom blew a fuse and had a complete emotional melt down when met the groom's future father-in-law. She recognized this man from her younger days and what she perceived she had

been treated unfairly. She called herself a Christian but in her heart, she had not forgiven this man for how, in her eyes, he had let her down.

The father of the bride did not have better reaction. He became very defensive and threatening in his reactions to her. He knew who she was.

The groom and future bride were overwhelmed by their parents' immature reactions not knowing what was going on.

Finally, they were each able to talk to their parents and understand the background and the root of such hostility.

Finally, for the love of their children, they were able to set their differences aside. The mother of the groom forgave the father of the bride for selling her defective pair of shoes. The father of the bride made amends. He bought and gave the mother of the groom a nice gift-bag with a new pair of shoes inside!

All's well that ends well. They were able to make peace. The base of their conflict was a grudge about a pair of shoes. This incident in their youth had distorted their perception of one another!

Both Edna and I thought how true this is to life about how we, human beings, can get so upset and bent out of shape about little things, inconsequential things that in the long run do not matter.

We need to let Christ live in us to be able to live in harmony in the church. We need endurance and encouragement from God to live in harmony with one another and in one accord with Jesus.

The bottom line is whether we are weak or strong in the faith, our responsibility is to love one another. God is the one who saves and not us!

This teaching is very important about how to be as a church with one another.

Let us pray!