

**June 21, 2020**

**Speaker:** Eric Naus **Series:** This I Believe – The Book of Romans

**Passage:** Romans 14:1-12

Community Group Questions: “Living For An Audience of One”

Background: in Romans 14:1-12, Paul describes a group in the Roman church who were “weak in faith” (verse 1) in the sense that their conscience would not allow them to eat certain foods (see vs. 3), and they felt morally obligated to observe certain religious days (see vs. 5). Scholars debate who this group might have been, but very likely, Paul is describing Jewish Christians who were having trouble with the idea of eating non-kosher foods (see 14:14, 14:20-21), and they valued the continued observance of certain Jewish weekly, monthly, and annual religious days (see verses 14:5-6). The Apostle Paul consistently taught that all the ritual food and festival laws of the Old Covenant were fulfilled in Christ (See Colossians 2:16-17). However, for many Jewish Christians, the kosher diet and observance of religious calendar days was bound up with their cultural heritage, and it could be very difficult to eat and act as “freely” as their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ could do. Paul refers to Gentile Christians as “the strong” (see 15:1) because they had a strong conscience, and therefore, they could eat anything without any sense of guilt. Romans 14 address how these two groups of Christians (Jewish and Gentile) should treat each other with regard to these “non-essential” issues.

1. In verses 1-3, Paul tells the Roman Christians to “welcome” the one who is weak in faith because they have been “welcomed” by God in Christ. He warns against “despising” or “judging” one another on these non-essential matters of diet. Can you think of examples in the church today where we might be guilty of despising, unfairly judging, or not welcoming each other because of non-essential issues? (For instance, matters of dress, worship style, cultural differences, or non-essential and secondary doctrines?) How do Paul’s words here correct and instruct us?
2. Verses 4-9 insist that we must view every true believer as a “servant” of the Lord Jesus, and therefore, we must understand each other as accountable to the Lord. We should realize that our lives are lived out, ultimately, before an audience of one – Jesus himself! Do you think of people in the church that way? Why or why not? How do these verses help us know when to interject into someone’s life with correction (see 1 Thess. 5:14) and when to leave a matter alone?
3. Compare Paul’s tone in Romans 14:1-12 with his tone in Galatians 1:6-9. In the case of Romans, Paul instructs the church not to judge each other on the matters at hand (non-essential issues of eating certain foods and observing certain days). However, in the case of Galatians, Paul makes strong judgments and gives stern warnings to the Galatians because they were wandering from the true gospel! In the case of Romans, Paul insists on non-judgment. In the case of Galatians, Paul urges them to judge! What’s the difference? How do we know when to judge, and when not to judge, biblically speaking?
4. Take time to brainstorm as a group, listing a number of contemporary divisive “issues” facing the church in recent days – issues that are “secondary” in nature, and issues on which Bible-believing Christians

might come to varying conclusions. In light of our passage in Romans, how should we treat each other in our church, when it comes to discussing these matters? In what ways are we doing well as a church? Where do we need to repent and do better?

Prayer suggestion: Along with praying for individual needs in the group, take time to pray for our church family as we navigate the tremendously difficult issues that have surfaced in our nation in recent days. Pray that we will have the gracious spirit Paul calls us to in our passage.