



ROMANS CHS. 14-16: "OH, WAIT, I'M NOT DONE YET!" * SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2023 * PASTOR ANDREW SMITH

ANNOUNCEMENT: FOR INITIATIVE INFO DINNER: TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2023 AT 6:30 PM FOR DETAILS ABOUT "FOR"

Wedges are designed to separate what was designed to be joined together.

Last week we were talking about architecture and the Roman Arch. Amazing as it was, there was one feature absolutely necessary: the keystone that allowed it to bear the weight. The keystone of our faith is just to love people where they are. There are also things that unite and divide. Wedges are designed to separate what was designed to be together. Paul wants us to realize there are all sorts of wedges that we throw into our relationships all the time based on false assumptions or opinions.

- 1. What are some of the ways we draw immediate conclusions, assumptions, or opinions about people?

When personal opinions become primary issues they create wedges.

[Romans 14:1-3] A lot of our wedges are frankly stupid and based on personal preferences and perspectives. They keep us from living in relationship with other people. Closing out the Book of Romans, this is what Paul wants to address this between believers. He wants us to be aware of the things that keep us from genuinely loving people. He instructs us not to argue about disputed matters because when side issues become primary issues, they become divisive issues. Our best interpretation of "disputed things" is opinions—things not based on fact or knowledge. We all have opinions—and we need to—but we can't let them become wedges where Jesus wants to create unity. Sometimes we just need to agree to disagree and not break friendship over a disputable matter.

- 2. What kinds of opinions (especially theological opinions) have you seen create significant differences of opinion between Christians?

It all boils down to the facts that we're guilty and Jesus is innocent.

[Luke 23:40-41] Secondary opinions have zero bearing on one's salvation. So, we need to understand what the irreducible minimum is. Here's the one thing that is the one confession of the Christian faith: We're guilty and Jesus is innocent. People will say there's got to be more! Theology is important. Doctrine (our set of beliefs and ability to explain them) is good. They are important, but not essential. Look at when Jesus was crucified with a thief being crucified on each side of him. Both were hurling insults at Jesus but then one of the thieves becomes convicted and tell the other to chill out. He says they are guilty but Jesus has done nothing wrong. Jesus doesn't talk to the thief about theology. Jesus says he will see him in Paradise.

- 3. If you have a well-developed set of theological convictions, do you have a hard time accepting this?
- 4. Is there really anything else that is a "core" belief essential to salvation based on the story of the Two Thieves?

Decide not to be a stumbling block.

[Romans 14:13-14] All other beliefs and convictions hang on the conviction that we're guilty and Jesus is innocent. We should hold our convictions and persuasions, but they cannot be wedges that divide unity because a stumbling block is something that causes what otherwise should be a clear path to be unnecessarily difficult. Some people throw a handful of Legos where others need to walk. We have to ask if we're defending our positions and being right or is it about defending the supremacy of Jesus. Wanting to be right should not be the goal in theological discussions.

- 5. Understanding theology is good, but how can your theology become a "stumbling block" for new believers?

In our pursuit of unity, we tend to get it confused with uniformity.

We often feel like pursuing our own positions is pursuing unity. We think that if others have the same theological positions that we do, we'll have unity. But, we tend to get it confused with uniformity. Unity is being joined as a whole like a band or the human body with many diverse parts that work together and every part is important. Uniformity by definition is a lack of diversity and a lack of variation. We see this in the church sometimes over worship styles, pews vs. chairs, literal vs. figurative interpretation of Genesis, and other opinions and preferences. That's the issue Paul addresses to the church—they have more diversity than ever but one confession in Jesus. The church today is to pursue diversity, but only have one confession. Because of Jesus, we're in it to win it, and it's just that simple.

- 6. What preferences have you seen break up friendships within the church or caused people to leave the church?

Knowledge puffs up but love builds up.

[Romans 15:1-2; 1 Cor. 8:1] We need to grow in our faith and understanding of the Scriptures, but we need to do this with gentleness and respect. More times than not when we grow in what we believe, we can become a little belligerent. Knowledge we collect for the sake of knowledge will make us prideful and arrogant. This leads us to seeking uniformity. What we're supposed to do as mature believers is to build each other up. Our job is to love new believers even if they have a long way to go in understanding the deeper points of theology. Loving them where they are is what lets us have dialogue and refine one another. Mature believers...it's not about protecting what meant so much to us, but about giving away our faith to the next generation or new believers who begin their faith walk just knowing that they are guilty and Jesus is innocent. Jesus welcomed you just where you were and we need to welcome new believers from a place of grace.

- 7. What does it look like to model this type of grace when a new believer expresses an immature theological viewpoint?

Pastor Andrew's Concluding Questions

- 8. In what direction is your knowledge of God trending you?
- 9. Is what you know about God increasing your love for other people and for God?
- 10. If not, why?