

LEADER GUIDE:**"GRAY AREAS" – Romans 14:13-23**

Main Point: *Our freedom in Christ should always pursue the good of the weak, following the example of Christ.*

SERIES OVERVIEW: The gospel of Christ not only brings good news of God's grace for undeserving people, it also transforms the way we relate to each other and our world.

PASSAGE BACKGROUND: Paul has spent the first 11 chapters of Romans giving a foundation of truth so that he can start in chapter 12 to call us to a vibrant and active Christian faith in light of that truth. Chapter 14 focuses on our need to show deference and love to our brothers and sisters in Christ who may differ from us on non-essential, debatable matters.

[NOTE: Please refer to the Sermon Insert Questions from the service program or go online to see the original connecting, understanding, and living questions]

CONNECTING:

Allow your people plenty of time to share. You can learn a lot about your people's personalities, level of faith, and understanding of Scripture by how they answer these connecting questions. Use these connecting questions to understand and diagnose the condition of your flock rather than to teach. Listen more than lead in this section.

QUESTION #1: *What one thing spoke to your heart the most from the Word of God in these Scriptures?*

QUESTION #2: *What are some apparent 'gray areas' in Christianity? Why do some of these matters cause so much damage relationally?*

- Mode and timing of baptism
- Whether or not to consume alcoholic products
- What kind of music to listen to
- What kind of movies to listen to
- Who to vote for; what party to affiliate with
- These cause so much problem because it is not clear in Scripture which way is right...in fact, this lack of clarity in Scripture appears to be God's way of saying neither is right or wrong, but *gray*. When we go outside of Scripture's clear teaching to determine whom we should and should not align ourselves with, we become judgmental, arbitrarily partisan, and ultimately divisive within God's people.

UNDERSTANDING:

QUESTION #1: Read Romans 14:13-16 – How is it possible to cause others to stumble (sin) by living out the freedom we have in Christ? What basis does Paul ask believers to set aside practicing some of their freedoms? How can good things be viewed as evil?

- If we do something in front of a brother or sister that we feel good about but they feel is sin, we can cause them to be grieved: to be drawn away from the faith because of your *perceived* hypocrisy or to be tempted into participating in something that their conscience will not allow them to enjoy with freedom, but guilt instead.
- A love that seeks to avoid “destroying” one of Christ’s beloved, redeemed people. Additionally, he does not want us to create a scenario where something that is legitimately given by God for us to enjoy is perceived as evil by other Christians because of a weaker brother misunderstanding our use of that gift.

QUESTION #2: Read Romans 14:17-19 – Why does Paul cite a distinction between things we do (eating & drinking) and who we are (righteousness, peace, joy)? Why is pursuing peace so important in the body of Christ?

- External things are not what is ultimately important. These things do not determine our holiness or our standing before God. Jesus makes this clear in Matthew 15:10-20. Our right standing with God...and our identity as His free and beloved sons and daughters...is not determined by what we eat and drink. It is determined by the righteousness given to us by Christ, the peace He makes for us with the Father, and the joy that comes with realizing our new identity in Him.
- A marker of true Christian faith is peacemaking. If we have truly experienced peace with God through Christ (Romans 5), then we will follow in His steps to make peace with our brothers and sisters. If we do not seek to make peace and build them up, then it may be that we do not truly know Christ...in other words, it may be that we are not “acceptable to God” (14:18) because we have never truly been saved. Our failure to love our brothers and sisters by refraining from doing things in their presence that could hinder their faith is a good diagnostic test of our own faith.

QUESTION #3: Read Romans 14:20-21 – What does it mean to ‘destroy the work of God?’ Why should we be careful with how we choose to exercise freedom in front of others?

- He means that we can cause other Christians to be scandalized by our actions and cause them to stumble in their own faith.

- We don't want to cause our brothers and sisters to violate their consciences by participating in things that they believe are sinful, even though we know them not to be. Our influence could cause them to indulge in something that they have not had sufficient time to work through in their conscience via the Word and Spirit.

QUESTION #4: Read Romans 14:22-23 – Why is it vital to make decisions based on firm convictions?

- If you are not fully convinced in your own mind after seeking out God's Word and Spirit that a particular action is non-sinful, then when you engage in it you are violating your conscience. You are not doing the action in "good faith" or in freedom. Instead, you are engaging in the act still wondering if you are directly sinning against God.
- This is why the old adage, "If in doubt, throw it out" came into prominence. If you are not fully sure that God is pleased with a particular action, don't do it. If you do it with this uncertainty in your heart, it is like you are saying to God, "Hey God, it's possible that you might be upset if I do this action, but I'm willing to take that chance because I really, really want to do it. Sorry, God". This is not the response of a godly Christian.
- A better response is this: "God, I am not sure that you approve of this action. So, I am not going to do it right now. Instead, I am going to keep praying for guidance, studying your Word for insight, and asking godly leaders and counselors for advice. If I come to the honest conclusion that you are certainly ok with this action, then and only then, will I participate in it."

LIVING:

Spend some time discussing these questions. Let your people freely digest what God's Word is telling them. Make sure to write down important things that are communicated so you can pray for your flock and help them take next steps in their new commitments.

QUESTION #1: What is the danger of reacting to viewpoints you disagree with, rather than living based on careful convictions?

- If you are not fully convinced of your opinions from Scripture, you are flying...or rather, arguing...blindly. You may say things that you really don't fully agree with, thus violating your own conscience and sinning.
- Additionally, you may cause other brothers and sisters who hear you to stumble in their faith because they are influenced by your ill-formed opinions.

QUESTION #2: What are some ways in which you've exercised freedom in Christ in gray areas without considering those weaker in the faith? What should you do in response?

GOSPEL OPPORTUNITY:

At this time ask your group to privately reflect if there is anyone who feels like they have never repented and received Christ's forgiveness. Then, share the gospel: 1.) God is our authority (Gen. 1; Rom. 1:18-23) 2.) Each of us have rebelled and sinned against His authority; (Rom. 3:23) 3.) Because of this rebellious sin we are under the penalty of His condemnation and wrath; (Rom. 6:23) 4.) Jesus came to die and rise again to wash away our sins and bear the wrath of God in our place (Rom. 5:6-11) 5.) All we have to do is receive this free gift of grace and eternal life by trusting in Christ alone for our salvation (Rom. 6:23 & 10:9-11). Allow people to share right there with the group that they desire to be saved and then pray over them and have them pray to receive Christ as Savior. Have group members gather around and lay hands on them. Or offer to talk with anyone after group about these things if no one is comfortable to open up in front of the group. Please let me know what happens!! How exciting!!

REVIEW: What were last week's assignments?

Talk to your group members about participating together in the LoveCR events!!

REFLECTION: Discuss last week's assignments.

Spend time talking about how your group can get involved together for LoveCR this year.

NEW Follow Up Assignments:

Bring donations to put in the LoveCR Hope Basket project basket in the lobby of the church.

ALSO: Continue to promote the G.I.F.T.S. assessment to those who have not yet taken it.

NEXT STEPS:

1. Help your people take the G.I.F.T.S Test. Take it yourself to lead by example. Talk about your results in group. Encourage them to take it and share about their gifting and where God may be calling them to take their next step with Jesus.
2. **Question: Have you invited someone new to your group lately?**
3. Make sure your roster and attendance are up to date in InFellowship!