

Against Cold, Judgmental Christian Orthodoxy

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[0 : 00] So, one of the things that many non-Christians say about Christians is that Christians are often very judgmental and unloving.

In fact, I think one of the things that non-Christians would say about Christians is that not only are we very judgmental and unloving, that we're often nitpickers, and in fact, we're the type of deadly nitpicker that will leave no nit unpicked when we're examining other people's lives.

And some of this criticism of us is unfair. I know there's a guy I talk to all the time at Starbucks, and I mean, he's actually the most opinionated guy that I know, but he accuses me of being very judgmental because I disagree with him on one or two moral issues.

And I don't think in that particular case it's fair. But the fact of the matter is, is that the non-Christian complaint about Christians being judgmental, about us picking fights, about us having cold, unloving hearts, is often true.

But what I think the average non-Christian isn't aware of is that the Bible agrees with them. The Bible says that Christians are in danger of having unloving, cold, hard hearts, and of being judgmental nitpickers who leave no nit unpicked.

[1 : 33] But in fact, when a non-Christian complains about us, they're just saying, in a sense, what the Bible says and warns us about. So we're going to look at that text because I don't think any of us wants to have a cold, unloving heart and to be a judgmental nitpicker.

So it'd be a great help if you open your Bibles and turn to Romans 14 because this is really what the chapter is about. It's warning us about the problem of becoming judgmental, cold, hard-hearted, even while we believe all the right things about God.

And so it's a really important text for us to think about. And it's Romans chapter 14. And we'll begin reading. Just we'll look at the first four verses and then we're going to pause.

And we're going to have to camp at the beginning of the verse for a bit of time because it's one of those texts which I'm going to show in a moment that we think we know what it means, but we actually don't.

And the problem, anyway, we'll get to it. Romans 14 verses 1 and following, we'll read the first four verses at first. As for the one who is weak in faith, and just sort of pause right there.

[2 : 47] In chapter 15 verse 1, it's going to talk about the strong in faith. So all the way through the chapter 14, it's sort of Paul is setting up. He doesn't use the word strong in faith until chapter 15 verse 1, but that idea is present.

He's contrasting the strong in faith to the weak in faith all the way through this chapter. And that's important just to note. So read this again.

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.

I'll explain what this is in a moment. It's not complaining about vegetarians. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains. That's the one who eats meat.

And let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats. For God has welcomed him. And just pause for a second.

[3 : 50] The word judgment here doesn't just mean like a type of a judgment, like a good judgment. Oh, I'm coming up to the intersection here. Should I make, do I go left or right?

Well, you make a judgment that you're supposed to go left or right. What it's talking about here is judgment's a good word, but it can have either a sort of a, just a neutral connotation or a bad connotation.

And here the word has a bad connotation. It means that you've, you've, you've looked at somebody, you've judged them, you found them guilty, and you've sentenced them to a terrible penalty.

That's, that's what's, that's what it's saying here in the Greek. So it's, it's judgment. In this particular case, it's judgment with a very, very bad connotation. Hard-hearted condemning of another person. You don't consider them innocent until proven guilty. You find them guilty. Find them worthy of a punishment. I'll just read it again. Verse 3, let not the one who eats despise the one, despise, note that, despise the one who abstains.

[4 : 54] And let not the one who abstains pass judgment or condemn the one who eats. For God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment?

All the way through here, the word judgment has that condemnatory sense. 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. And just one other note here, the word translated servant, I'll read it again. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? In every case in the New Testament where you see the word servant, or some of your translations will say slave or bond servant, it's translating the word doulos. There's only four places in the New Testament where a different word is used, and this is one of the four places.

And this is not the word doulos, which either is translated as slave or bond servant or servant. The word here basically means like they're a servant, but they're like they're part of the family.

[5 : 57] It's a very close, intimate word. I don't know how else to say it other than this isn't just an employee or a slave.

This is like they're, it's almost like another son or like another daughter. This is one of the only the four places in the New Testament where that word is used underneath that. So just to listen to it again in verse four, who are you to pass judgment on the servant?

The person who to the Lord, they are as close to the Lord as a son or a daughter, as a brother or a sister. That's how close this person is to the Lord. 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.

So let's just sort of take a pause, because we have to sort of understand who the weak in faith are and who they're not, and who the strong in faith are and who they're not.

If we don't sort of have a bit of a sense about this, we're going to misunderstand the text. So the first thing to understand is that they're not, Paul is not making a point here about how we would usually use weak in faith.

[7 : 05] There are many of us here today who are just really beat up by life. Some of us have maybe had a traumatic or terrible event in their past, and we're still living with the echoes of it, and it's still very real.

I mean, I talk to some people sometimes, and they'll tell me about a traumatic event, and I'll think it happened just a week or a month ago, and it might have happened 5, 10, 15 years ago. It was an event that just completely rocked them, knocked their stuffing out of their life.

Some of us are dealing with weakness because we're just struggling with depression. Maybe we're struggling with a besetting sin that we just can't seem to get over. Some of us are just getting old and just making us feel weak.

And that's often how we use the word weak, just beat up by life and circumstances, and that's not what's being meant here. The Bible has lots to say for those of us who are struggling with that, but this isn't a text about that.

It's talking about something quite different. In fact, hopefully I'll be able to show you in a moment what the text here, what is meaning by the weak, is from a sociological or psychological point of view, a person we might think of as being very strong because they're very confident.

[8 : 28] They're very articulate. They have lots of energy. They're filled with zeal and fervor. And it's a person who can be like this that the Bible is describing as being weak in faith.

And the other thing to understand about this text is that the Bible is not describing people who are non-Christians, who are maybe just getting a little bit of faith. We're trying to sort of sort out if they're members of the faith.

Whenever you see the word faith in the book of Romans, just to make sure you have a bit of a sense about it, just remember this phrase. You can't be half pregnant. You're either pregnant or you're not.

And the book of Romans talks about a saving faith that makes you right with God. And when God has made you right with himself, then you're his.

You might be just weighed down with a besetting sin. You might have had a financial thing happen to you or a physical thing happen to you, or you might be dealing with an illness of a loved one or the death of a loved one that just completely, you might be dealing with just unbelievable.

[9 : 36] The bills are higher. Your bills are higher than the ceiling. You're really weighed down. It doesn't mean you're not a Christian. It just means you're a Christian who's really weighed down by life. And that's, once again, not what the weak in faith is describing here.

It's describing something else. And maybe the way to get it is to tell you something that happened when I was potty training one of my kids. And I can't remember now which one it was, thank goodness.

But so, you know, they're trying to get out of diapers and learn how to poop, sorry, on a toilet rather than the diaper. So they say, yeah, I have to go to the bathroom.

So they go to the poop and, you know, they're just sitting there. I'm standing by just, you know, thinking. The little child is lost in thought. They're very articulate.

And all of a sudden, out of the blue, my child says to me, God has really big teeth. I was just daydreaming.

[10 : 35] Now I'm looking. And then the child says that God has really big fangs and really big claws. Nothing has bigger teeth and fangs and claws than God.

He has the biggest teeth and fangs and claws of anybody. So I think to myself, my budding theologian, I said, well, what makes you think that?

And the child says, well, God is stronger than monsters. And I, my Sunday school teacher, maybe it was Louise, told me I don't have to be afraid of monsters because God is stronger than monsters.

And monsters have big teeth and fangs and claws. So God must have bigger teeth and bigger fangs and bigger claws. Isn't that wonderful?

If you're very curious about this, it's really important. If you Google sometime horrid red things, an essay that C.S. Lewis wrote, and he talks about how, anyway, horrid red things.

[11 : 52] It's a great article to look up on the Internet or find in one of his books. So, you know, so I said to my child, yeah, that's exactly right. You don't have to be afraid of monsters, et cetera, et cetera. So within, you know, his or her little mind, that's how they understood how powerful God is.

And that's completely and utterly fine. Now, if that child went on to become 35 and they still thought that God had claws, et cetera, there's some problems, right? And we can all laugh at it because we can understand that it's just, you know, he or she trying to figure out a complicated, you know, theological truth.

But here's the problem. We don't understand when our culture forms us to make big mistakes about what the Bible is saying.

We don't realize it when we are doing the adult equivalent of big teeth and fangs. And so when we think of strong and weak, we think in physical or intellectual or aesthetic or class, social class terms. That's how we think. We think of the strong person being the well-educated person. We think of the strong person as being the articulate person. We think of the strong person as the one who has lots of energy.

[13 : 06] We think of the strong person as being the one who's very confident, the one who's able to get their way, the one who can manage people, the one who can be very, very persuasive. We think in sociological and psychological.

We think in cultural terms. And so when we see this word strong, we tend to think of it in terms of these types of cultural categories. But that's not at all.

If we read that all the way through this, we're going to misunderstand the text. All the time we read it in Romans 14, we're going to misunderstand it. Just as it would be if a person still thought that God literally had fangs and claws and big teeth.

The Bible here is talking about something different, which means that you don't have to be well-educated to be strong in faith. And you don't have to be of the upper middle class or go to Oxford or to be young and healthy or to be beautiful to be strong in faith.

The Bible never says that any of these categories are the same thing as being strong in faith or being wise. Never. We bring these cultural things to the Bible.

[14 : 13] But the Bible, if we're careful, is always undercutting them. Andrew, if you could put up the first point, please. No, not the text.

Sorry. There we go. The strong Christian has a clear knowledge of both the gospel and the Bible and can thereby distinguish between what is first order, second order, and error.

And I'm going to explain that in a moment.

But the first thing to understand is don't instantly slip into thinking in terms of cultural categories.

Some of you may say, oh, dang, I couldn't pass a theology test on stuff like that.

I couldn't write about stuff like that. Let me tell you, in my previous church, there was a man named Artie. He's with the Lord now. If he was here now, he'd be all red-faced. And afterwards, he'd be a bit grumpy with me for using him as an illustration.

[15:18] But he's with the Lord. I'll use him as my illustration. Man named Artie. He had a grade 2 education. When I knew him, and he was in his late 80s, he lived...

You know, if you think places like Eganville and Killaloo are rural, where Artie lived is where people in Killaloo think it's rural. He was a hillbilly.

He had a grade 2 education. Just because a person only has a grade 2 education doesn't mean they're not smart. It just means they don't have book learning. He built his own sawmill.

He could fix anything with a motor. He could do electrical wiring. He built his own house. He worked hard with his hands and provided for his wife and his many kids and was beloved by his grandkids and all that.

But let me tell you, Artie, with his grade 2 education, he might not have been able to either pronounce or spell a whole pile of complicated Greek and Latin and theological words.

[16:19] But he had a clear knowledge of the difference between first and second order things. If you asked Artie, do you have to be a real... You know, is it the case that only real Christians...

You know, is it a case, Artie, that, you know, if you don't have the right view on baptism, if you believe that, you know, you have to be baptized as a child or you have to be baptized as an adult, do you think that's really essential to the Christian faith?

Artie would have shook his head. No. That's not essential to being what's really important in the Christian faith. You could go through a whole list of things, and I bet you any money that Artie would have got all of those distinctions right.

Grade 2 education. So don't... When you read this, that's why I say clear knowledge. Because some people aren't very articulate, but they know it.

They live it. Now, this isn't... I'm not... By saying all this, I hope you don't go away thinking that I'm encouraging you to be stupid. God has given some of us IQs that are through the roof.

[17:25] Use them to the glory of God. Some of us, God has given the ability to really be disciplined and study. Use it to the glory of God. I'm not putting anybody down here. I just don't want us to automatically think that because you teach at Oxford or Wycliffe, they can understand these things better than Artie.

That's, in fact, definitely not the case. The well-educated people can throw a whole pile of big, complicated theological words at you, but ultimately it's just they're confused and they're weak in faith.

Now, in the text here, we're going to unpack this a little bit, right? So what this text is trying to get across is that the strong Christian has a clear knowledge of both the gospel and the Bible and can thereby distinguish between what is first order, second order, and errors.

And here in the text, Paul gives four examples of a second order issue. Just four examples, but there's four. The first one here is in verse 2.

One person believes he may eat anything while the weak person eats only vegetables. Just for the record, my wife has been a vegetarian for a long time. I was a vegetarian for five years, so I'm not saying this because I have some special pleading that is referring to vegetarians as being weak in faith.

[18:41] Paul is saying here that it's a thing indifferent. But what the context probably is is that in the time that Paul wrote, every idolatry was mixed into everything. And most of the meat that would have been served in the market was first sacrificed to a pagan god or goddess.

And so Christians were trying, people who became Christians out of paganism, or even Jewish people who didn't sacrifice the animal to a god or goddess before they ate it, they were trying to sort out how to live and follow Jesus.

And so some people were saying, the only way to do it is just to only eat vegetables, never eat any meat. That's the safe way. And Paul is saying, no, no, no, you've misunderstood the issue.

Being a vegetarian or eating meat isn't a first order issue. And then if you go down a little tiny bit to, sorry, I lost my page here, it's a terrible, oh yeah.

If you go down to verse 5, there's another example. One person esteems one day is better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. [19:48] Here it's not probably referring to keeping the Sabbath. It's referring to something that if you're at all from an Anglican or a Roman Catholic or Lutheran or Eastern Orthodox background, you have a bit of a sense of it.

I'm not making this up. And for some of you, if you're not familiar with the weirdness of Anglicanism, this will maybe come a complete and utter surprise. And by the way, I'm going to have to be really careful here. And I ask your prayers for me.

I struggle with this all week. And so I ask your prayers. I have two things. I don't want to give you folks the impression that I am stridding around on the stages of I'm a strong Christian.

And everything that I know perfectly, the difference between strong and weak. I'm not saying that. I don't want to give that impression. The other thing is in some of these cases, I might inadvertently lead a brother or sister to fall because I'm going to talk about alcohol and other types of things.

And I don't know how to use examples to deal with the text without talking. But, you know, I don't want to lead anybody into falling. So just, you know, pray that the Lord will cover this place, okay?

[20:51] I'm not trying to be proud. I really am not. But use this example about Anglicanisms and special days. There's some Anglicans who believe that you shouldn't say the word hallelujah during Lent.

Sorry, I smile because I think it's ridiculous. I apologize. So this is a true thing. I was in a meeting and the budget, this was a big meeting for like a national group.

And they were all Anglicans. It was Annick. And we got a financial report. And it was way better than the bishop was expecting. He said, hallelujah, look at this. And he was told off by somebody in the room.

I am not making this up for saying hallelujah during Lent. Now, this shows how fallen I am. Some of you who are old, remember that old chorus? Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, praise ye the Lord.

You know, you often get the guys and the girls standing up. I immediately wanted to go into singing hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, praise ye the Lord. And look right at the guy who told off the bishop.

[21:48] That just shows how fallen I am. Okay? But it just, you know, maybe it's like, maybe it's in some evangelical churches, real evangelical churches, real charismatics, real godly Christians.

They fast once a month. When the pastor calls for a day of fasting, real Christians fast. Look at all those other second class Christians who don't. Okay? Special days. Special days.

The Bible doesn't say anything about these special days. It's not a first order issue. Another example that the text gives is verse 14. We'll start at verse 13.

And therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother or sister. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean.

And what this is referring to is that, you know, whether it's a Jewish person who's become a Christian at the time or whether it's just a pagan who's, you know, reading what we now call the Old Testament. He's just reading Isaiah.

[22:54] He's reading Leviticus. He's reading Deuteronomy. And he comes to the conclusion that he has to follow all of the Old Testament laws in Leviticus and in Deuteronomy and in Numbers and Exodus. He has to follow them all. And he starts to become that he has to follow or she has to follow these things.

And what happens here is that they haven't understood the significance of the gospel. And they haven't understood how Jesus has said himself that all foods are clean.

They haven't understood that Jesus is, in a sense, the great lamb, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, that he is the way that we are made right with God, not by keeping these commandments and that all of these dietary things, they had their place, but Jesus has inaugurated a new covenant.

They don't understand that. And that's still a common thing. It's amazing how many people, often in more evangelical and charismatic churches, they almost become Jewish worshipers.

Like they want to get the Jewish trumpet to blow and they want to wear Jewish prayer shawls. And you can just sort of tell that they wish they were Jewish. They want to add all sorts of other Jewish stuff.

[23 : 58] And it's a common problem. It's a recurrent problem. And Paul says it's an example of being weak in faith. And there's just one other one, which was a really important one for me when I was a teenager, but I don't care about any more.

It's, where is it here? Verse 21. We'll start at verse 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.

It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. In other words, being a teetotaler. And, you know, there are many, many Christians who believe that you shouldn't drink alcohol.

It's even a condition of membership in some denominations. I don't know, it used to be in the Salvation Army. But some, I think, I won't go into other denominations where it's still a, you know, a part of membership.

It's considered to be an essential part of the Christian life. And Paul says here that they're wrong. It's not an essential part of the Christian life to abstain from alcohol. Here's where I don't want to cause anybody to fall.

[25 : 10] But it's not an essential part of the Christian faith. I can remember because even though I came to faith, I was getting deeply involved in the counterculture, and I came to faith through the Jesus People movement.

My Christian memory was a very fundamentalist type of church. And even though I didn't really like the church very much, and I found it boring and irrelevant, when I came to faith in Jesus, a lot of that still carried over with me.

And I still remember, to my shame, one day how there was a fellow who had really been very, very, very helpful and important to me in helping me to grow as a Christian. And I happened to be in a bus.

And as I was in the bus, I looked out the window, and he was walking carrying a six-pack of beer. And I despised him in my heart. I despised him in my heart.

And said, I'm not going to listen to this guy anymore. What type of Christian carries a six-pack down Bank Street? I'm just telling you what went through my heart. But I was wrong.

[26 : 15] I was wrong. You see, what Paul is trying to get at is that the Gospel and the Bible makes a distinction between first and second order things.

And if we don't understand the distinction between first and second order things, we're going to keep getting into trouble in the Christian life. And some Christians have the problem that they want to make, and that's why I put it here, first and second order things in error.

Because the Bible here isn't saying, so some Christians, the problem they have is they want to make everything black and white. You voted for Harper? How can you be a Christian if you voted for Harper?

You didn't vote for Harper? How can you be a Christian if you didn't vote for Harper? You listen to that type of music? How can you be a Christian and listen to that type of music? How can you be a Christian and dress this way?

You know, real friends don't invite their friends to go to Starbucks. I read that on a blog just a little while ago. Like, you know, and I bet they'd also say, and Tim Hortons, whoa.

[27 : 26] I mean, their eyes would probably roll up and around their head a few times like that, you know. Tim Hortons, gosh, that's even worse, you know. And how many people at Tim Hortons fans love making fun?

I know one guy who goes to Tim Hortons all the time. He calls Starbucks five bucks. Because unlike Tim Hortons, you can't get a coffee for less than five bucks at Starbucks. So he calls it people who go to Starbucks, there you go, off the five bucks.

Let's go get that coffee at Timmy's, my double-double, you know. And here's the thing. It's a human problem to make these. In fact, this is really significant, that it is in fact a human problem.

And one of the things which is so significant is why it's a human problem, even in secular culture, of making these types of distinctions, of turning everything into black and white, or getting all caught up on the things which really don't matter.

And it's interesting that the Bible articulates this as a problem and sees the gospel as a solution. And that as we read the Bible and go deeper into the Bible, that as the gospel forms us, we'll realize that there are some things which are essential, which are central, which we can't give up.

[28 : 34] But most other things in life are second-order things. And even some things in the Bible are second-order things. I would suggest that today, baptism is a second-order thing.

And I've now offended a whole pile of people, but I think it's a second-order thing, not a first-order thing. Christians in good conscience read the Bible and believe that God allows the baptism of infants.

And Christians read the Bible and in good conscience believe that God restricts it to adults. I think that's a second-order issue. I think whether you're premillennial or amillennial, that's a second-order issue.

Christians in good conscience differ on those things. But more significantly, second-order issues is what type of music you sing in church. The Bible doesn't tell you that there's a godly key and all other keys are ungodly, or that there's a certain progression of notes, which is the godly progression of notes, and every other progression of notes is ungodly.

It doesn't tell you whether you can use written prayers or not use written prayers. Any one of those things can be completely and utterly abused. I was at a wedding once, and they asked this minister to do an extemporaneous grace over the food.

[29 : 45] 14 minutes long at a wedding. 14 minutes extemporaneous. The guests did not have to have the entire history of salvation recounted for them.

They were just hoping for, oh, Father, bless Bob and Betty. May they have a great marriage. Thank you for this food. Bless us and help us to support Bob and Betty in their married life.

Amen. That was all they wanted, not 14 minutes. Anything can be abused. There's a whole pile of things around music and church structure that are set, like not even, like they're like third order issues, and that doesn't even count the other issues, which is another type of second order issue, which is, true confession, I don't really like Beethoven.

I like Bach. I don't like Beethoven. You know, I really like that weird experimental jazz music that goes all crazy, that's instrumental. I actually find that very relaxing.

I like working with it in the background. I like listening to Hillsong United and Bethel. I like French vanilla ice cream and barbecue potato chips, not together in the same bowl.

[30 : 57] First the barbecue potato chips, then the ice cream, and then maybe back to barbecue potato chips because I have a weakness for them. You see, the thing about them, these are all completely and utterly indifferent. It's not that anybody, that's what Paul is trying to get here.

And Paul is saying that it's rooted in the very nature of the gospel, and that as we get deeper into the Bible, it leads us into a deeper sense. Could you put up the next point, Andrew?

I think it's often mistakenly quoted by Augustine, but it's actually, isn't that a great name? Robertus? Any of you people are looking for new baby names for your son?

There's just a spectacular one, and he'll be the only one in his class. Yes. Robertus Meldenius, in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.

In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity. Now, I'm going to have to do something here, which I didn't really want to do.

[31 : 57] I wrestled with it all week, but I wouldn't be serving you as your pastor if I didn't do it. And so, last week I talked about same-sex marriage, and I'm going to talk about it again.

Because it's very relevant for the state of the church right now. And so, it's not that I have a bee in my bonnet. You know what it is? I was trying to think of an analogy. It would be as if, in the Second World War, the Second World War starts, and there's a soldier, a Canadian soldier, and they happen to be on leave or something, and they're in England, and they wire home, and say, oh, the Second World War has started.

I'm going to rush home as fast as I can to defend the Canadian border against the Americans. And the commanding officer would go, no, go to Holland.

Go to Poland. Like, go to where the battle actually is. And there is increasingly a move within the church to say that same-sex marriage is a second-order thing that Christians can differ over.

In fact, often, people who can use all sorts of fancy Greek and Latin words, they'll look at Romans 14 as an example, and they'll use the example of food laws as how it's just one of those things that Christians can differ over, and they are completely and utterly wrong.

[33 : 25] You're wondering what I really think? Sorry. They're completely and utterly wrong. They're completely wrong, especially using the book of Romans. Romans 14, Romans 1, is one of the most important texts understanding the nature of acting on same-sex attraction.

And just if you were here last week, you'll see that twice, just in the verses before this, Paul upheld the biblical teaching of adultery, of porneia, the porneia word group.

And in that, the Christian teaching is that God has made sexual knowing as a good thing, but sexual knowing is to be a great gift that is to be exercised only within the context of a one man to one woman in holy matrimony, and that any sexual knowing or sexual stimulation outside of that is guilty of porneia.

The Bible treats it not as a second-order issue, but as a first-order issue. And so to try to twist this as if, especially in the book of Romans, after what's just gone on all the way through in Romans 13 and Romans 1, to try to make it look now as if same-sex marriage is a second-order thing, it's just not what the Bible teaches.

Now, I'll talk again in a moment, and it breaks my heart to use this as an example. I just, I don't want Christians to be misled. It's, you just can't be misled about it.

[34 : 58] I really don't want that. sometimes, you see, what the Bible here is saying about the difference between first in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity, it's a very, very wise statement by this old German guy who wrote during the Thirty Years' War, by the way, during the war between Protestants and Catholics.

That's when he wrote this as part of an essay. And, the Bible wants us and calls us to make important, understand important first-order things and be willing to argue for them in a charitable way.

It's just also saying that the closer, the more we understand the first-order things, the more we understand that these other second-order things are just things that we just have to treat as things of liberty. Just quite a few years ago, I went to an international consultation in Kenya.

It was in, I think, the year 2003. And I was one of four Canadians who went to this international consultation of about 150, 200 people at it. And in my group, my discussion group, which was on the uniqueness of Jesus, there was four guys from England, all with PhDs from Oxford and Cambridge.

There was me, duh. Carlton grad. An Ottawa U grad. I mean, that just makes the Oxford and Cambridge guys quake in their boots when they hear you went to Carlton and Ottawa U.

[36 : 32] Sorry, I went to both, so I can make fun about it. Right, okay. So anyway, and then the other like 12 people in it were all from Africa, Sri Lanka, India, you know, Asia. And as we went into this topic, I started to notice that these four guys who were from England, or three of them in particular, and the other guy got wrapped up in it, they started to make all of these things undermining the uniqueness of Jesus.

They also kept making disparaging comments about the fact that there are demons. And I put up with it a little bit at first. I had gone into this thing thinking that I was going to have to check my cultural blinders at the door because I wanted to really learn from my African brothers and sisters and my brothers and sisters from India and Sri Lanka and Asia, and I was just going to have to understand that there were going to be cultural differences.

I hadn't come expecting that I was going to have to listen to somebody from England undermine the deity of Jesus, the uniqueness of his death upon the cross, the fact that he is God's provision for salvation.

So I started to argue with them. And it felt really uncomfortable. I was the only one arguing with them. And this was a consultation that went about six days. I did this for two days straight. I constantly was arguing with them.

Nobody was backing me up. I felt very discouraged. So I decided I was just going to be silent. I was just going to roll my eyes. No point getting into arguments all the time. Then just after I had given up, a couple of the African brothers and a Sri Lankan brother, they were all men, they came and said, can we talk with you?

[38 : 01] Can we have tea with you? I said, well, I'll have coffee but you can have tea. And they said, they came to this event just like me. It was really neat. The Sri Lankan and African brothers.

They said, we came to this event realizing that different people from cultures speak different ways. And when we heard these people from England speaking these things about Jesus, we just thought

we weren't understanding them.

Like it sounded wrong but maybe it's just the way somebody from the first world talks. But then over these last two days, we've heard you argue with them and everything you said we agree with.

And now we realize that these guys, it's not a second order thing. They're undermining a first order thing. So they told me that they wanted, they still wanted me to do most of the talking because they felt a little bit uncomfortable that English wasn't their first language, right?

But it was a very, very different thing and it eventually had to be dealt with at the conference. So here's the thing, is the Bible's not saying that we stop making judgments about first order things like the resurrection, the incarnation, the virgin birth, but basic sexual morality things.

[39 : 08] But there is a huge area of second order things that we just have to practice liberty with. That's what the gospel is leading us to. And the gospel is leading us not just to this, but not to abuse our strength.

I have to be careful at the time. I'm going to have to wrap it up a bit earlier than I want. I want to go to a couple of prayers. But if you could, Andrew, put up the third point, please, for me. You know one of the things which is really neat here about if you go back to Romans 14 verses 1 and following, you know, hopefully I've given you enough of a context that if you read Romans 14 you understand what's going on in the text.

Notice here what it says, it's for the one weak in faith welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything while the weak person perceives only vegetables. 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. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. He will be upheld for the Lord is able to make him stand.

So here's the thing. What's so precious? You know, I would much rather have been fighting battles in the church over the uniqueness of Jesus than over things like same-sex marriage.

[40 : 29] Every single one of us in this room is sexually broken. Every single one of us has sexual issues. And even those of us who don't maybe have directly sexual issues, it's very, very hard for a lot of couples, for the man and the woman to understand how to love and respect each other.

There's often women who don't seem to be sexually broken who are unable to respect their husband and don't even feel remotely guilty about it.

In fact, almost take it as a badge of honor. So every single one here is sexually broken. And I know that there are people probably here who find a powerful attraction to a member of the same sex. And there are people here who probably feel very uncomfortable in the biological sex that they were born with and feel that they should be something else. And here's the thing.

On the cross, in the cross, we see God doing everything that has to be done so that he can welcome fallen, broken, imperfect, but deeply precious human beings like you and me.

[41 : 42] Jesus does this for us. This isn't just a matter of God putting up a high, I'm open, you're welcome to come in. Like, it would be as if God wants to welcome people in a place and he comes into that place.

He crosses the ocean, so to speak, to welcome. He comes and picks a location. He comes and he pays for a food to be, a banquet to be put out. He pays for the whole place to be cleaned.

He pays and provides a tent so that people can be welcomed into a place that's protected from the elements where it's safe because there's security and where there's food and there's provision and everything is clean and there's maybe even provision so that people can wash, they can get new clothes.

He does everything to do the welcoming. He crosses the distance. He sends Jesus and Jesus pays the price of our rebellion so that we can be clean.

He's the one who makes us clean. He's the one who deals with our rebellion. He's the one who deals with our shame. He's the one who perfectly accomplishes the law. He's the one who will clothe us with his righteousness.

[42 : 52] And the cross is God's powerful act to welcome sexually broken human beings like you and me. And let me tell you, he welcomes but he doesn't affirm.

And he's not picking on any particular group. He welcomes but he doesn't affirm what we do. On the cross, Jesus accomplished everything that needed to be accomplished for me to be welcomed by God.

So I can only come to him in humble, receptive faith. Let's just, in closing, there's three prayers just to try to bring this home to you and then we'll close. I'll just read each one of them out.

In fact, actually, why don't we stand? Do you want to join with me in reading each of these three prayers? I know some of you like to write, make notes. It'll all be on the web page of one of these prayers that speaks to you. This is a way to try to bring the points of this home in terms of how we change our lives, how we know the freedom of Jesus, how we start to be healed of our mistake and confusion about first and second order things and being willing to deal with error.

Would you say this prayer with me? Dear Lord, I confess that I flatter myself too much to detect or hate my own sin. Please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel whom you are helping to confess how weak is my grasp of the faith and how quick I am to condemn other Christians.

[44 : 26] Help me to see the log in my own eye before I see the speck in another's eye. That's one of the things that none of us are going to say, you know what?

I'm really weak in faith like that. I'm the hard-hearted judgmental person. It's a harder thing to acknowledge that. The Bible's inviting us to pray into that. Next prayer, Andrew.

Join me in praying this, please. Dear Lord, please forgive me that thinking that being right is enough. Please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel who will surrender my freedom for the good of my brothers and sisters in you.

Please help me to live for your praise, not my praise. See, this is the text that says if you go to have a meal with a whole pile of Baptists or Pentecostals or a whole pile of Reformed alcoholics, you don't buy beer.

You just don't. If you go to witness to Muslims, you don't eat a ham sandwich while you brought along your dog. And if you invite, if you come to some Jewish Christians, you don't serve them a cream soup with shrimp, ham, and beef.

[45 : 47] You just don't. The final prayer. You got it up there? Dear Lord, please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel who daily meditates upon your word written and who's growing in their knowledge of you and of your truth.

Please deliver me from idols. Please renew my mind and my heart. Please help me to live for your glory. Let's just bow our heads in prayer.

Father, you know the different areas that we're weak in and you know those areas that we're strong in. You know those areas where we have a firm grip of the gospel and you know, Father, those areas of our lives where we're still arrogantly filled with legalism and a religious spirit and a condemning, despising, looking down our nose at others.

And Father, you know how we don't even recognize that that's what's going on in our hearts, that we feel self-righteous and self-justified about this. And Father, we bring this before you. We want to be formed by the gospel.

We want to be formed by your word. We want to live free. We want to have strong minds and soft hearts and we want to live lives that are loving of people and bring honor and glory to you.

[47 : 01] Father, we need your help. We need your mercy. We need to be gripped by the gospel and we ask that you would gently but deeply pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. And this we ask in the name of Jesus.

Amen.