

## Romans #31 - Church Family: Supernatural Liberty

- If you got a Bible we're in a book of the New Testament called Romans. We're taking about a year going through it. We find ourselves in Romans chapter 14. And for those who are joining us online, maybe from outside of the United States of America, let's just tell them what weekend is it here in our blessed country. It's 4th of July, Independence Day, Independence Day. So, yes, if you're watching online, it's a bad day if you're British, but it's a good day for us. So this is our independence day, and this is the time when we, as Americans, honor freedom and independence and liberty by grilling and blowing things up. And that's just how we do it. And so what is really interesting is we're in the book of Romans. The text this week is about Christian liberty and freedom that God gives his children. It perfectly fits because God's word is perfect and it always perfectly fits. And so the question that Paul is addressing in Romans 14 is when the understanding of Christianity, what we call the gospel of Jesus Christ or Christian faith moves from one culture to another culture, does it need to keep all of the cultural heritage, can it adopt the new culture? What's acceptable? What's unacceptable? This happens, for example, in the early church. So we are followers of Jesus. We love Jesus. We believe in Jesus. We want you to love and follow Jesus. What are you trying to do? Get me saved? Totally. Thanks for paying attention. We're into Jesus. And we know that Jesus is God and he came down from heaven, but he entered into a nation called Israel. He entered into a culture that was Hebrew. He spoke the Hebrew language. He had the Jewish holidays. He ate the Jewish food. He was a Jewish Hebrew man. That's how he lived his life. And then what happens is most of the first Christians, they were all Jewish. And then the understanding of Christianity, what we would call the gospel or the good news of Jesus Christ, it moves to Gentile non-Jewish culture. And that's to whom Paul is writing. He's writing to the city of Rome, which was not Jewish. It was largely non-Jewish. And then the question was, well, do we need to do everything that the Jewish people did or do we get to do things our way? Do we have any freedom? Do we have any liberty? Do we have any independence? And, ultimately, there are three ways to answer this question. And this question is hugely important because even in our own country, there's different cultures and subcultures. There are people in America from all kinds of nations. In addition, there are urban, suburban, rural people. There are subcultures. If you don't believe that people in America are different, just go to San Francisco. There are some differences, okay, or just go to Apache Junction, if you can't afford the gas to make it all the way up to San Francisco. Those people are different too. So there are subcultures within and they would be offended, but they haven't gotten the internet yet so they won't hear about this. But what happens is, it's gonna get worse. If you're new, you won't get used to it, but it's okay. So what happens is well, that even generations are different. How many of you, your grandparents and the way your kids walk with Jesus or your grandkids walk with Jesus is a little bit different. The Bible translation they prefer, the kind of Bible teachers that they listen to, the kind of music that they enjoy. And this is really, really significant. And there are three ways, when it moves from one culture to another, that Christianity can determine how it should proceed. Number one is colonialism. That's where Christianity is in a culture and it moves into a new culture and not only does Christianity come, but so does all of the culture. You need to wear the same clothes, speak

the same language, do church the same way. Everything needs to be exactly the same. That's colonialism. It's not only bringing Christian faith, it's imposing culture. And there is a whole book of the Bible against this in the New Testament called Galatians. And the Jewish people were telling the Gentiles, "Well, yeah, you could take Jesus. He was Jewish. You also need to take everything that is Jewish. You need to take the dietary laws, the holidays, circumcision, all of that, and just take it all." The Gentiles were like, "We love Jesus. Circumcision, we're not nearly as excited about, that as heaven." So do we have to take this? Can we change our diet? Can we eat things that Jewish people won't eat? Do we need to get rid of all of our holidays? And the book written to the Galatians is there are things that are biblical, there are things that are cultural. All Christians, regardless of their culture, need to agree on the things that are biblical. But then there's a little freedom, a little independence, a little Liberty in the areas that are cultural. The other way that it can err is the culture takes over Christianity. And what this is, this is compromise and it's happening right now today with Red-Letter Christianity, woke-joke folk, it's happening with critical theory, it's happening as a mass generational apostasy and that is that Christianity goes into a culture and what the Bible says and what the culture believes are different and then what people say is we want to be Christians, but we want to be Christians that put the culture over the Bible. And if we disagree with the Bible, then we're going to need to make some edits or modifications to the Bible so that we can accommodate our culture. This is nothing new. It happened in the early days of the church, there was a book written, 1 Corinthians, and they wrote a long list of questions to the Apostle Paul. Christianity went from Judaism where everything was settled over into this Roman Greek culture. And their questions are like, "Ah, can we have sex before marriage? Can we be transgender? Can we get drunk? Can we live or sleep with our boyfriend or girlfriend or boyfriend's girlfriend's boyfriend's girlfriend's?" Very complicated org chart. They had all of the can we go to strip clubs and church? Can we worship Jesus and be parts of other religions or spiritualities or ideologies? They write all of these questions. And what he says is no, no, no, no, no. That when culture and scripture disagree, God expects his people to repent of their culture and receive his culture. And then the way that Paul is going to argue is that we should not just colonialize and shove everything that we prefer on every other Christian, not compromise and let culture just change Christianity so that we lose our distinctiveness or biblical convictions altogether but something that missionaries will call contextualize. And that is what is biblical, what is cultural? What has to be there for Christianity to exist? And what are the liberties, the freedoms, the means of independence that God gives us so that different Christians in different cultures and subcultures and generations and nations and languages can all love Jesus and be faithful to the scripture while also effective in their culture. It seems complicated. We'll jump right in. Romans 14. I'm gonna give you three big suggestions. And this is about how we do life together and how we get along as a church family, how we get along with other Christians and other churches. He says, "Therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another, any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the way of a brother tripping somebody, saying or doing something that makes them trip over their conscience and their convictions." He says, "I know and I'm persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks that it is unclean." 'Cause what he's not talking about here is sin, but he's talking about opinions, okay? Sin is a bright line and God draws a bright line. And he says, "Don't cross

this line. Otherwise you're in sin." And so you can't murder somebody, you can't lie, can't steal, can't have sex outside of heterosexual marriage, bright lines. He's not talking about sin. He's talking about opinions, not primary, but secondary matters, not things that God has forbidden, but things that we have some measure of freedom. He told us this at the beginning of this section in chapter 14, verse one, he literally used the word opinions. So these are not God's opinions. Those are facts. These are our opinions. These are our preferences. And what he says is, number one, things are neutral, but people are not. What happens oftentimes in religion, people will use something in a bad way, and then we will make religious rules and legalisms to get rid of the thing, not realizing that the thing was neutral, the person who used it, they were the one who was evil or sinful. Things tend not to have a conscience or a will or make volitional decisions. People do and if you a person who loves the Lord, you're gonna use things in a way to honor the Lord and help others. If you've got some brokenness or some wickedness in you, you're gonna take that same thing and you're gonna use it for evil and harm. I'll give you an example. Is a stick a good or a bad thing? It all depends on what you do with it. What if I find a stick and I give it to a kid and they use it to play wiffle ball, good or bad? Very, very good because we believe in Jesus and wiffle ball. So that's good. What if we find a stick and we give it to a kid and the kid uses it to play fetch with their dog, good or bad? Good! What if we find a stick, we give it to a protester and then they start beating somebody with it? Bad. You should know that, that's not trick question. So you can look at the stick and you can say, well, is the stick good or bad? The stick isn't good or bad. It's just a thing. It all depends on the heart of the person who wields it. It could be used for good or bad. What religious people do they say, well, if anybody ever uses anything bad, we need to forbid it and get rid of it. Well, then we forbid and get rid of everything because everything can be used by a sinful person in a damaging and wicked way. Things aren't necessarily bad, but people are. And this is why non-Christians will never fix the world because only God can change people. And until we change people, it doesn't matter what we do with all of the stuff that's out there. It really is requiring the spirit in here. And so what he's saying is he says, okay, so stop fighting over everything out there and start paying more attention to what's in here. In addition, the big idea is this, that the problem is not just out there. It's where? It's in here. It's in here. And what he's saying is there are problems out there. There are problems out there. Our world is filled with a lot of brokenness and a lot of temptation and a lot of sin. There are problems everywhere, from temptation and entertainment, to over-consumption of alcohol, to all kinds of sexual proclivity and sin, not to mention all the nonsense on the internet, our work, there's a lot of stuff out there that is not good for your soul. And so we need to be aware of that. We need to pay attention to that, but just changing what is out there does not help you unless God changes what's in here. And this is the issue. This is the issue of our entire world. Everyone wants to change the systems and the behaviors and the educational process and they wanna change everything in our world, but only God can change what's in us. And that's our soul. That's our nature. That's being born again. I'm just reminded of it. There is a Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Behavior Disorders and Mental Health Problems. It is kind of the Bible for the psychologists and the therapists. And it has zero mentions of the human soul. All non-Christian treatment of humanity overlooks the fact that you have or are a soul. And until that changes, you won't change. And that you can't change that, only God can change that through his son, Jesus Christ. And so what he's saying is all the

problems aren't just out there, they're also in here. What this means is we need to reduce the amount of temptation and lies, frustrations, evil that surrounds us but we can't just look out there. We need to pay a lot of attention to what's going on in here. And that's what he talks about. He's talking here, he uses this kind of language for anyone who thinks this or decides in their own heart. The problem that he is arguing against is what I would call religion. And religion is all about what's out there. It's not about what's in here. It's all about pretending rather than living in the spirit. The biggest opponents to Jesus Christ and to Christianity ever since are religious people. This may shock you. This may shock you. The greatest threat to Christ and Christianity are religious people who only deal with the out there and they make lots of rules to control and judge everyone and they don't really let God judge them and they don't change in here. Jesus speaks to these people in Matthew 23, 27 and 28, "Woe to you," that's a curse, that's a warning. That's Jesus' shots fired. "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, religious people, hypocrites for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful." If you see an ancient tomb, let's say it was marble. It would just be beautiful, inlaid marble, just glistening pure and white. But what's in the tomb? Just dead man's bones. And what Jesus is saying is everyone sees out there. But I see in here. What you're doing is you are performing for those who are watching. You're not worshiping the one who knows the heart. He says, "You are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and uncleanness. So you outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you're full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." What he's arguing against in Romans 14 is the same thing that Jesus Christ was arguing against. Religious people come along and what they say is the way we do it is the only way to do it. Our way is God's way. And if you wanna do it God's way, you need to do it our way. And we're going to judge you and punish you and threaten you. And we're going to push you and dominate you and bully you until you do it our way and if you don't do it our way, then you're not doing it God's way. And what they're doing, they're putting themselves in God's position. So then they start imposing all of the rules. They're starting to impose their conscience, all of their demands on everyone else. Religious people are very overbearing. They're very domineering, they are very self-confident. They are very self-assured, but he calls them previously in Romans 14, the weak not the strong. This position may be strong, but their faith is weak. They don't trust that God can lead someone so they try to lead them. They don't trust the God can judge someone so they judge them. And they don't trust that God can control someone so they control them. And they don't think that God will forgive someone so they try to keep them from ever doing anything wrong. And the quickest way to destroy your relationship with God is to have a relationship with a religious person. The quickest way to destroy your family is to allow a religious person to rule over your family through their rules and their demands and their commands and their decrees. They're taking God's position. So here, what Jesus is saying is that religion is a real threat to the relationship. But as we live our life in our culture, what he's saying is this, don't make a lot of rules and just demand that everybody obey you, that's religion. But also don't put a stumbling block in someone's way. My wife, Grace, was an all-state sprinter. She was really fast, but I caught her. So we've been married ever since, but she was very fast. And every once in a while in a race, you would find certain people that were racing and they would cheat and they would seek to trip. And what religious people do, they trip you up and what some people will do, they'll put temptations in your ways, or legalisms in your

way or rules in your ways, things that God didn't give, things that they are giving and as a result, they trip you up. So the question is this, this is the big idea. Here we are, we're a church. By God's grace, we're a growing healthy church, four years old, super grateful for all of God's grace. On a lot of issues, not the primary, but the secondary. We have different conclusions, different convictions. We do life differently. How do we get along if we're different? How do we have unity with liberty? How do we have diversity with charity? And I wanna share with you three basic categories for how to live in culture that I have used for more than 20 years. Receive reject, redeem. So the first is there are things in culture that, as a Christian, we can just receive them. Now I'll give you an example, air conditioning.

- Amen.

- I've read the whole Bible. I can't find air conditioning and I don't care. I still believe in it. I'm for it. And you should be too. When we first bought this building, the air conditioners were original to 1966. It was one of Jesus' miracles, but it didn't work very well. It was basically like an elderly man breathing on you. That was kind of our air conditioning here. It was not very soothing. It was not very soothing. And so what we've since done, we've upgraded our air conditioners and we like air conditioning, amen, amen? And some of you are new to Arizona. You're like, "Do you need air conditioning?" And let's say, you're watching online. Do they need air conditioning if they move to Arizona? Oh yeah, you do. You do. It's not optional. 'Cause otherwise, like let's say right now, you're watching, I dunno, somewhere in the Midwest, go turn on your grill, crank it all the way up and then climb in it. That's Arizona. That's where we're at. So we can receive air-conditioning. And you know what? You may do some historical work and say the guy who invented air conditioning, he was a godless pagan. And I'd be like, I'm still for air conditioning. We're for electricity. We can receive that. We can take the preaching of God's word. We can put it on the internet. The internet is something that can be used for good or evil. It's like a stick. It all depends on your heart. So this year I think 100 million people are going to get Bible teaching from the Trinity Church in Scottsdale, Arizona, all around the world. So we can receive all of that. We can turn the electricity on. We can turn the air-conditioning on. We can turn the laptop on. We can send out Bible teaching, we receive all of that, Amen? There are other things that we have to reject. As we go into culture, there are things that as Christians you're like, I'm out, I'm out. But this is why we don't have Christian drug cartels. And if you do, shut it down, please shut it down. Shut it down immediately. We'll just take a minute. Text all your friends, "It's over." Just tell them. We don't have Christian drug cartels. We just don't. We don't do that. We don't have Christian abortion clinics. We just don't. And if that offends you, you're wrong. We don't have a Christian non-traditional marriage, we don't. There are certain things that we just have to reject because God rejects them. There are certain things that we need to say no to because God says no to them. We're not trying to be religious. We're trying to be obedient. And God knows right and wrong. And God knows what's best for us. And when God says no, the answer is no. Need to reject that. So there are things that we can receive, there are things that we must reject. And there are things that we can redeem. Like the stick, they're not necessarily good or bad, they can be used for good or bad and someone maybe was using it for bad, but we can redeem it and use it for good. This concept of redeeming is super important because God

redeems us. And there are things that we can redeem. So what I wanna do now, this is gonna get real practical. What happens is certain people come along and they're saying, okay, as we're Christians in the culture, they would say anything that has a pagan origin is pagan. So we can't do it. It's out. It can't be redeemed. And they would have things like Easter, which was the pagan holiday, Eostre, which was to a cult fertility goddess, Christmas, which was originally Saturnalia, which was a pagan holiday and also Halloween, which was Samhain, which is a pagan witchcraft holiday. And they would say all, we gotta reject all of that. So let me talk about this. And this is where parents tend to really, I mean, it's like the Crips and the Bloods with moms at this point. It gets bad, because we tend to get the most legalistic about the people and things we care the most about. And we're trying to protect them, which isn't a bad thing, but we need to help them think through how to make their own decisions, not just give them lots of rules, but help them have a relationship with the holy spirit who can lead and guide them. So that being said, how many of you have heard anything that is pagan in its origin, Christians need to reject, we cannot redeem it. So I had a friend of mine. I don't know if he's a friend anymore because we had this conversation. So he is a pastor and he was very, very religious. Like he was like to the right of Jesus. And I'm like, bro, you gotta scoot over, here to the right of Jesus. So he was more conservative than God. And so he had a lot of rules. He was a very religious guy, a lot of rules. And we had this argument and he's like, "I don't think the Christian should do anything that has a pagan origin. We shouldn't be involved in anything that has a pagan origin." And so he wanted to argue about Christmas and Easter and Halloween. So I said, "Okay, well I'm happy to have that argument. I mean, I'm always ready to argue. That's my second spiritual gift. I'll argue with you." But I knew something about him and that is that he drove a Volkswagen. The whole context in Romans 14 is not judging. So I won't, but we all know the answer. So anyways, so I knew he drove a Volkswagen. So I asked him, I said, "So we need to reject everything that has a pagan origin." He said, "Yes, we do." I said, "Okay, what car do you drive?" He said, "I drive a Volkswagen." I said, "Do you know that the Volkswagen was invented by Adolf Hitler. He created a cult called Nazi Germany and he was worshiped as a demonic counterfeit of Jesus and a false God. And he was a mass murderer. And probably not just demon-possessed, but Satan-possessed." I said, "You need to get rid of your car. You're a hypocrite, you're a hypocrite." 'Cause it has a pagan origin. Much of our engineering in the Western world comes from Germany, comes from the Nazi era. Your microwave started with Nazis. Now, if you love hot pockets, I'm not judging, but we all know the answer. You could go home and say, we're getting rid of everything pagan. So put the microwave in the Volkswagen and drive them both off a cliff. And then now we're good. Or you could redeem it, true? You could redeem it. You could say, "You know what, I'm driving the Volkswagen to church and I am microwaving vegetables to honor the temple." So you could do that. So receive, reject, redeem. And what Paul is talking about in Romans 14 in their church, there are Jewish people and Gentile people, and they're having an argument. What do we do with the holidays? What do we do with the diet? What do we do with education? What do we do with entertainment? What songs do we listen to? What kind of band do we have? What do we do on the weekends? They're having these arguments. So let me give you some case studies. So let's start with, let's start with, let's start with the easy one. Let's start with a hard one. So should Christians celebrate Halloween? I'll just sit here for a few hours and you guys can sort that out. So Halloween, did it start as a pagan holiday? Very

pagan. And if you don't know that, you're not paying attention. I don't like, here's why I don't like Halloween. First of all, demons, witches and terrifying children. I don't think that's the heart of Jesus. Jesus like, "Come to me, all you children, and I'll scare you!" He just doesn't do that. That's not how he rolls. Here's a bloody head, and diabetes. I mean he doesn't roll like that. And so Halloween started as a pagan holiday. So can we just, as Christians, receive Halloween the way everybody else does it? Here, dress up like a witch. We'll dress your brother up like zombie. We'll dress your dad up like a leech. We're gonna go terrify the neighbors. We're gonna do spells and seances. No, no. And if you're doing that, stop, like stop, like right now, text your kids, "It's over." So is it okay for some Christians to reject it and say, "You know what? I'm out. I don't wanna do Halloween." Is that okay? What about if you come from a background of witchcraft or the occult and you're like, "You know what? I was in Wicca. And I know what they're about and I'm out." Is that okay? Is there a way to redeem Halloween?

- Yes. Okay, we just found the religious moms. They're like, "No, no, no, no." Yes, there is a way to redeem it. So some churches will do something, not Halloween. They'll redeem it and have a Harvest Festival. Well, happy Halloween, no! Harvest Festival, different age, totally different. So what do you do at the Harvest Festival? We dress up and eat candy. This sounds familiar. I've heard of this. Or we do Reformation Day. So if you're in a conservative church, we do a Harvest Festival. If you're in a really conservative church, we do Reformation Day. We dress up like dead Protestant Reformers and we burn books and we don't eat candy. So different Christians will try. And I'm so glad I'm not monitoring the comments online tonight. You can redeem it and there are different ways to redeem it. How about this one? Easter was originally the pagan holiday Eostre to a fertility goddess, which is why it includes the egg. Why it comes out of the rabbit? I don't know. That is not a smart person. I think the egg came out of the bunny. Well, I feel sorry for the bunny. Okay. That looks like a lot. So it starts as a pagan holiday, so can we receive Eostre, worshiping a pagan fertility goddess as Christians, yes or no? No, you cannot. Is it okay for some to reject it? Yeah. That's okay. And then can we redeem it? So some do. And the point is we didn't know what day Jesus rose from the dead. They're like we got the day off. Let's make it that day. And instead of Easter, we have resurrection of Jesus. That's how Christians redeemed it. Now the big debatable one is Christmas. Christmas was originally the pagan holiday of Saturnalia, pagan holiday Saturnalia. The early Christians had the day off. They're like, "We don't know when Jesus was born. We've already got the day off. We'll turn it into Christmas, Christ mass, church for Christ, church for Jesus. We're gonna throw a birthday party for Jesus." We don't know when Jesus was born. The Bible just says that the shepherds were in the field, which probably means the springtime, not the winter 'cause it would have been too cold. We don't know when he was born, but they didn't know. So they just said, "You know what? We got the day off. We'll take it." So some of the early Christians started celebrating Christmas. Now later on, so let me ask you this, as Christians can we just receive Saturnalia and worship a pagan deity every December? Answer? No, no, no, no, no. Is it okay for some to reject it? Yes. Historically, they have. There was a group of Christians called the Puritans. They rejected Halloween. Excuse me, not Halloween. They rejected Christmas and they worked on December 25th in protest. And so there were some who rejected Christmas. Is there a way to redeem it? Yeah, many Christians do. We throw a big Christmas Eve service for Jesus. We've

got the Nativity Scene. We tell the Christmas story, we make it about Jesus. There are ways to redeem it. The point is this, in every culture, in-between cultures, all of you come from different places, you have different backgrounds, you have different opinions, different conscience, different convictions. And what a legalist will say is, "I'll just tell everybody what to do." And what the Bible says is, "the holy spirit to tell everybody what to do." And you're not the holy spirit. And there are things that we need to all reject. There are things that we can receive then there are things that can be redeemed. So let's have this conversation because we have nothing else to do. So Santa. I mean, it's 175 degrees out so I know you wanna talk about Santa. So let's do that. Should or could Christians celebrate Christmas with Santa? How many of you yes? You're like, yeah, a percent. How many of you, no? Let me tell you this, we vote differently on this at the Driscoll house. Grace isn't here. So I'll tell you her flaw. So when we got married, I was like, "I like Santa." She's like, "I don't like Santa." Some of you are just anti-clown people. That's a whole 'nother category. You're gonna say, "I don't like clowns. And that's sort of a clown." I'm like, okay, no judgment but we know the answer. So what happened when we got married, I'd be like, "Hey, I like Santa." She's like, "I don't like Santa. Santa detracts from Jesus." I said, "No, no, no, no, no. Santa can point to Jesus." So pray for us, we've been having this debate since the 80s. And the point is that you don't need to agree on everything to love each other and do life together. That's why we're still married. And if you're married, it's true for you too. And so her point was, "You know what, Santa is a bunch of myths that lie to kids." And mine is, "But under the Santa story, there is a really good redeemed or redeemable story." So Santa, originally, was a guy named Saint Nicholas. He was born, I've got it in the notes. He was born in the third century in what is modern day Turkey. He was born into an affluent family. His parents died tragically when he was very little. He got a massive inheritance. He was raised to love Jesus. He did love Jesus. He was a Christian, and he was very generous. He would give all of his inheritance or most of his inheritance to needy children. He would give gifts. He was perhaps most famous, there were three sisters who couldn't afford a dowry for their wedding so they were gonna be forced into a life of prostitution. And he heard about it and he paid their dowry so that they could live their destiny. He loved children, he really, especially, loved girls who didn't have a dad or provision. So he's a great guy. He's got the father's heart. He became Bishop of Myra, which is a city that Paul visited, I think, in Acts 27, he became the Bishop there. Throughout the course of his life, he gave away an incredible fortune to help those who were poor, especially women and children. When he went to the early Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and he argued and voted for the deity of Jesus Christ. He's a great guy, great guy. He died and then he was canonized as a Saint. And when you get canonized as a Saint in the early church, you get a holiday, there's a day that's given to you. I think it was December 6th, which was right around the holiday for Saturnalia. So the early Christians said, we've already got December 25th off, let's redeem it. Let's make it about Jesus' birthday. And since it's close to the holiday of Saint Nicholas, let's include him in the story as an example of someone who really loved and served Jesus and taught the Bible and was generous toward the poor. It's great. It's great. But then what happens is, over time, they add a lot of folklore and myth and legend. From around the world, there were various folklores. Kris Kringle was one. There were others that were included and they got piled onto the true story. So there's the true story of Saint Nicholas and then there's all of these folklores that come. One of them was that there was a sherman who

lived, check my notes up in Siberia, which is near the North Pole and that the sherman would travel around the world, come down the chimney and give gifts to children and would leave hallucinogenic mushrooms. Some of you are like, "I like it now. That was a good sermon. Finally, we've had a point that I'm interested." That he would leave hallucinogenic mushrooms and then if you would give them to your reindeer, they would get high and they could fly. I'm not making this up. I'm not making this up. You know, it's fast times at Siberian High. That's what it is. It's crazy. It's Cheech and Sherman. I mean that's what it is. And I'm just making it up. And so what they did, they started layering all of these other folklores on St. Nicholas. So what did we do at our home as a family? We celebrated Christmas. We did. And when it came to Santa, can you avoid Santa in our culture? You can't. We sing songs to him. He's on TV. He's on ads. He's at the mall. He's everywhere. And so what we didn't wanna do is lie to our kids. I would just say, don't lie to your kids. And lying is this, we believe in Jesus and Santa and Jesus and Santa, they both do miracles. Jesus comes from heaven. Santa comes from the North Pole. Jesus rides into history on a cloud, Santa rides on a sleigh. Santa can visit the whole world in the night. Jesus came to save the world. Santa gives gifts to everybody. Jesus gives himself as a gift to the world. Hey, we believe in Jesus and Santa. Then the kids get a little older, what do they realize? You lied about Santa. How many of you, that was a devastating moment? How many of you didn't know Santa is not real and you just had a devastating moment? Santy? And how many of you were the religious parents? You weaponize your kids, you're like, "Go to school, tell 'em all it's fake. Tell them Santa's fake. Fake, fake, fake, fake, lying. They're lying. They're lying to their children. Children cannot trust their parents, go get them"? So what we told our kids was there was a real guy named Saint Nicholas, Santa who did love and serve Jesus. Lots of myths have been layered on that, but he was a real person, but we're not gonna lie. We're gonna tell you who he really was. We're gonna tell you who Jesus really was. And we don't wanna lie because if you grow up and realize Santa's not real or fairies, you might think that Jesus is not real. And I want you to believe in Jesus is real. And so, ultimately, we wanted to teach our kids the truth about both men and how Santa Claus really did love and serve Jesus. So we would let our kids get dressed up, we would let them, if they wanted to, get their photo with Santa. We had a couple of kids who are like, "I don't know, a creepy old man in a suit." And they were out. And I was like, "I understand I'm not sitting on his lap." And so, ultimately, even as a family, between my wife and I, every Christmas, we had to learn how to honor one another's conscience. And we needed to learn how to educate the children to think for themselves not just before or against, but to hear from God and what their convictions were for them. And this is the heart of Romans 14. And I know a lot of this seems silly. And I'll tell you this. I forgot to tell you too. So in a few weeks, we're gonna do Christmas in July here at the Trinity Church. You're like, "Listen, I don't believe at Christmas, especially in July. Then you get to put double grace on your church and just join us and what we're doing, we're buying 30,000 pounds of snow for your kids to go sledding in July in their swimsuits. That's what we're doing. All the non-religious parents are like, "Yeah, can we have Halloween candy?" All the religious parents are like, "I'm not coming. We're protesting. We're just gonna sit home and sweat." Either way. The point is this, when we disagree on things, we've gotta ask did God forbid it? And if not, how do we help one another grow and mature? How do we let you operate by your conscience, you operate by your conscience? And sometimes we may come to some different conclusions, but if we worship and

honor the same Christ, we should love one another and do life together. And so he goes on, "Be a burden-lifter, not a burden-giver for your brother, Christian is grieved by what you eat." If what you're doing is wrecking them, then you've lost sight of the relationship. You're no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So to not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. It's not about, necessarily, all the external stuff though that matters, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the holy spirit, the stuff in you. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So if Jesus is okay with them, be okay with them. So let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual building. When he says, as we come together as a church family, and we're different generations and races and incomes and backgrounds and perspectives and maturity levels and theological teams and tribes and traditions, the question is, do we all need to be the same? No, we all need to follow the same spirit. Our unity is not that we agree on everything, but that we agree that Jesus Christ is Lord. And we're all seeking to grow closer to him and become more like him. And as we're dealing with these issues, what he says is that we need to look to the kingdom of God. Now in chapter 14 verse 17, this is the only express statement in the entire 16-chapter book of Romans on the kingdom of God. So it's very important. And the point is this, Jesus Christ is our king. He rules a kingdom, a heavenly kingdom that is perfect and how life should be. We sinned and rebelled against him. He came down to save us, to fix our problem and to bring the kingdom into culture. Now as we are living in culture, we need to remember that we are residents of our culture, but we are citizens of his kingdom, that our ultimate alliance is not to our race or to our nation, or to our political party, though you can love your nation and you can have your political convictions. But, ultimately, your total loyalty is to the Lord, Jesus Christ. Because at some point, everything else is gonna go away and all that's gonna be is the Kingdom of God. So that's, ultimately, our highest priority. And since Jesus came down to love us and serve us and do what was best for us. What Jesus did, he says here, he died for us, he did what was best for us. He didn't do what was best for him. He did what was best for us. He came to earth. That was good for us. That was not good for him. He lived on the earth. That was good for us. That was not good for him. He died on the cross. That was good for us. That was not good for him. And what he did is he loved and he served us. And what he's saying is the kingdom is about loving and serving so that you can be blessing and benefiting others. That's what it's about. And so what he's comparing and contrasting is on the secondary debatable matters, on these things we disagree about, we can either live culture up or we can live kingdom down. If you live culture up, he says that people will be grieved. They're just gonna be wrecked and judged and disappointed and frustrated. True or false, that's what's happening in our culture? Everything we disagree about is head-on collision. Everything has just turned up to 10. It's just a circular firing squad on everything and people are grieved. They're just like, everything, does everything need to be so brutal? Can't we have some sort of conversation that is, at least, civil and respectful. No, we can't. Out in our world as well, he says that it's not walking in love. Anytime two people disagree in our world, the pattern of our world or culture, it's not walking in love. It's not. It's not. Our world is not a loving world. And heaven forbid you would disagree with someone. It is not going to be a good day for you. And if you're like me and you have a lot of opinions and you don't keep them to yourself, you can have a rough life. In addition, he says the way of the world is to

destroy. That's the word that he uses. That when two people to destroy, the way the world works is I disagree with you; therefore, I need to destroy you. I need to attack you, lie about you, eviscerate you, harass you. I need to absolutely destroy you. That's what he says. And then the last thing that he says is that in our world, good is spoken of as evil. You're like, you're doing a good thing and you're getting attacked for it. And they say, it's evil. I saw this recently, I had a dad call. He lives out of state. He's a friend of mine. His daughter went to school. She's like 10. The school gave an explicit sex education curriculum to the 10-year-old girl telling her things that she should try on other boys and girls. To me, it's just grooming for pedophilia. She comes home. She's got a good mom and dad. They love her. She's like, "What the heck?" As a Christian family, can you receive that curriculum? You can't. And it's so gross, there's no way to redeem it. You just need to reject it. So the dad prays over his daughter. I know this guy, kisses her on the head says, "Honey, I'm so sorry. I don't want you being sexualized at 10." So he goes into the principal's office, schedules a meeting. He says, "Look, we're Christians. I can't allow my daughter to start being indoctrinated sexually by someone that we don't even know, with a curriculum we don't agree with. Principals said, quote, "You're acting like a patriarch and a chauvinist, and you're oppressing your daughter." That's good being spoken of as evil. You're trying to sexualize my 10-year-old girl. I'm her dad. God gave her to me, not you. I've never seen a government or a school birth a child. The Bible is very clear that I will give an account mom and I will give an account for the kid. And that there are responsibility because they're our blessing. And we know our daughter better than anyone. We love our daughter more than anyone. And God says no. And we say no. Oh, you know what, fathers who were involved in their daughter's lives, they're chauvinist and their patriarchs. When did being a dad become an evil thing? Like if you have a dad who loves you, I don't know about you, that's a good thing. I mean, it's not like we have too few dads. It's not like the big problem in our nation is yeah, there's just too many loving dads who are involved, it's a crisis. But what happens is the good gets spoken of as evil and conversely, then, evil gets spoken of as good. Instead, he says when we disagree or we have a disagreement rather than living culture-up, we who have the Holy Spirit can live kingdom-down. Just like Jesus came down, the holy spirit comes down, we could live kingdom down. So you know what? We're not gonna do things the way people do them, who don't have the holy spirit. We need to do things the way that people are supposed to do things that have the holy spirit. And so he talks about love. As Christians, when we disagree, if we're gonna disagree, let's just do so in a way that's still loving. It doesn't mean we agree, but we agree that love is really important. And it means that I'm going to listen to you and I'm going to consider you and I would like you to listen to me and consider me. And if at any point I can add value to your life, you matter to me. And out of love for you, I wanna add value to you. He says, "In addition, righteousness, righteousness is through Jesus Christ. He died and rose so that we could receive his righteousness." Righteousness is not something that is achieved by you or me. It is received by you and me from Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life. We have not. He died a substitutionary death so we do not. And he rose to conquer Satan, sin, death, held the wrath of God. He took your place. He puts you in his place. He took the condemnation, gave you the salvation. He took the unrighteousness, gave you his righteousness. And this is one of the major themes that Paul has been summarizing all the way up until this point in Romans. And you know what's really nice, when you belong to Jesus, your relationship with God is secure.

"It's finished," Jesus said on the cross. I'm righteous, doesn't mean I'm good, means I'm righteous. Doesn't mean I did it right. It means he did. And the good news is this: once I know that me and God are secure, like he loves me, he forgives me, he adopted me, he'll never leave me, never forsake me, he put the holy spirit in me, he's written my name in his book and I'm gonna be in his presence forever, you know what that allows me to do? Take a deep breath. Stop being so anxious about my performance. Stop trying to impress him. And instead, just help others. If me and God are okay, now I have time and energy to help you. If me and God are not okay, I don't have any time or energy to help you. Since I am righteous, I can love and serve you. And this is amazing because the sense of righteousness in our culture, it's not just religious. It's very secular. Do you have the right hashtag? Are you funding the right cause? Are you canceling the right people? Are you attacking and destroying the right people? Are you defending the people that are on our team? Are you having head-on collisions with the people that are on their team? And all of it is, friends, it's virtue signaling, it's secular righteousness and it's people who are trying to perform outwardly rather than being born again inwardly. It's our whole world. And you can read Romans and say, "Well, it's just an old book." No, it's about the human heart, which never changes. And he says that those who live kingdom down, he says, the next marker is peace. There's a settledness to somebody in the spirit. You're like, even if things are crazy out there, things are controlled in here. Even if everything out there is just in flux, everything in here is in the spirit. There's just a peace about him. And what this means is that these kinds of people, they're just easier to get along with, they just bring peace with them because they live for the Prince of Peace. These are the people when they're your friend, you're like, there's just not as much drama, there's not so much conflict. It's not like I'm always juggling grenades with the pin pulled. It's not that complicated. People are like cars, some get good mileage. Some get bad. Some people, they're just exhausting, they're overwhelming, they're always in turmoil, there's always a conflict, there's always a crisis, there's always an emergency. There's always, and other people that are like, you get really good gas mileage. I can hang out with you and I just, I love you a little bit and you go 100 miles, I pray with you and we're good for six months. There's just a peace about you that is supernatural, it's a peace that surpasses understanding. He goes on to talk about when we disagree, we can also have joy. And this concept of joy, to me, is something that the Christian faith has, in our modern era, largely lost. Christian should be fun, happy, joyful people. You know why we laugh in church because we're gonna laugh in heaven. You know why we have waterslides at church 'cause we're gonna have water slides in heaven. Somebody like, where does it say that? I know the Greek text. Trust me. I'm an expert. And part of it is this, like, if you belong to Jesus and all your sins are forgiven and God is for you and the kingdom awaits you, you should have a peace and a joy. Yeah, I got problems. But at least my biggest problem is taken care of. And at some point, all my problems will end. This is why, friends, we throw parties. I had somebody recently ask me, they're like, "It seems like you guys spend a lot of money on parties." We do! And they were like, "How do you think God feels about that?" Great. That's why he keeps paying for it. He's doing good. COVID hit the world and we went to the Bouncy House, people and we're like, nobody's using the Bouncy Houses. Jesus wants them all. I just want, in your life, a peace and a joy in the spirit. I want your marriage and your family, a peace and a joy in the spirit. And when you disagree, it doesn't mean that you should lose love, righteousness, peace or joy. A disagreement is not so

big to push out the fruit of the spirit. And he talks about serving one another and mutual upbuilding, that as Christians, and I would say this in your marriage or with your kids, or even in our church family, which is a beautiful church family and I love you with all my heart, I really do, just looking at it and saying when we disagree, how can I treat you the way Jesus treated me when I disagreed with him? Because he already told us in 2:15, it's the kindness of God that leads to repentance, that me and Jesus didn't start out agreeing. We started disagreeing, but he was so good to me, eventually he won, not by controlling me, but by loving and serving me. I knew he had my best interest at heart. So I was willing to surrender and to follow him. And when he talks about mutual upbuilding, what it means is win-win. So I see the world in three categories. I see people that are demonic, it's a lose-lose. It's a lose-lose. You're like, you're both gonna lose. These are people who have the suicide bomber vest view of life. I will blow you up and I'm willing to blow myself up too as long as I blow you up. It's a lose-lose. The flesh, living in the fallen sinful human flesh is a win-lose. You give, I take. I win, you lose. I push and you surrender. It's a win-lose. Life in the spirit is a? It's a win-win. It's mutual upbuilding. Like, well, who won? Well, apparently God did because we both got blessed. I don't know about you. I'm a father. I got five kids. How many of my kids do I want blessed? All five, all five. God is a father. The father's heart is he wants to bless all of his kids. And so even when we disagree, it's so, okay. The father loves us both, he wants to bless us both, how do we build one another up? How do we help one another? How do we not agree with one another, but disagree in a way that is agreeable. And I believe this is so prophetic in timing because here's what I believe. I believe that our church is growing very fast and I believe it will continue to grow and I believe that lots of people are going to continue to meet the Lord Jesus, and you know what? Religious people are gonna come too. And they're gonna come with clipboards and rules and committees and press releases and commands and demands and out-of-context King James Bible verses and all get a nervous eye twitch. And they'll bring a shiv and pop our bouncy houses, and we're gonna need to love them and realize that they are the weaker one, not the stronger one. And then, I'm literally not halfway through the sermon. The nice thing is, is we're talking about not judging. So it's super-convenient for me. The timing is impeccable. If you're new, you're like, when does it end? Never. I'll just do one more verse and say whatever I think. And then we'll probably bring the band out, okay. Be a servant, not selfish, Romans 14:20-23. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. You know what? People are more important than your diet. People are more important than your hobbies. People are more important than your holidays. People are more important than your sports team. People are more important than your political party. And I'm not saying that those things are not important, but I'm saying people are more important because Jesus died for people. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what eats. It is good to meet or is it good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Don't go around saying, here's my rules. He's like, those are your rules. Keep those yourself. You can have your rules, but those are your rules. When we're together, let's talk about God's word. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats because the eating, if the eating is not from faith, for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. Here's what he's saying: number one, some people are really easily influenced. They don't know what to do.

And religious people wanna boss them around. Say, well, you just do what I say. One of the most important things you can do as a parent is not tell your kids what to do, but to teach your kids to hear from the holy spirit. This is why I ask my kids all the time, "What is God showing you? What is God telling you? What do you feel like God is revealing to you? Where do you feel like God is leading you? Sometimes it was right. Sometimes it was wrong. But as a parent, I'm there to help them figure out hearing God's voice for their life. And some people, they don't know what to do. They're tenderhearted, they're dear people. They wanna do the right thing, they're like, "I just wanna do the right thing!" Religious person's like, "Easy. Just do what I say." Anybody who's trying to be the voice of God in your life. Be very, very careful. In addition, what he's saying is that some people, their conscience is weak and it's not a sin but for them it would be a problem. And what he's saying is don't push them closer to the lie because that might not be good for them. That could cause them to be hurt or be harmed. The Bible says it's okay to have a drink, but if you're a recovering alcoholic, you need to back up a few steps. So you know what, I've got a friend of mine, he says this, he says, "Alcohol is undefeated in my life." He said, "I've never started drinking and not had alcohol defeat me. Every time I started drinking, I didn't stop until I was passed out." So the line is, is it a sin to drink? No, no. But for him, he's gotta back up from that line. What he's saying is actually that's a sin for everybody, like for me, this is as close as I can get. If I go beyond this, I get myself in real trouble. What he's saying is don't come behind that guy and be like, "Well, come on, enjoy your freedom in Christ. Come on, get close to the line. Get closer to the line, get close to the line." 'Cause you know what, you're hurting a person that God loves and maybe you're okay at the line and they're not. And here's the question, if you're okay at the line and they're not, should you drag them toward the line or should you go back and be where they're at? You should go back and be where they're at. You know why? Because you love them and you wanna have a relationship with them. And if this is as close as they can get to the line, that's okay 'cause you wanna be close to them. And the point is this, it's more about being close to them than the line. So I'll give you a couple examples. When I was in college, I didn't drink any alcohol, but there was a group of guys, we were all over 21 and there was a big game and they'll want to go to the sports bar and we're all Christians and all love the Lord. They were great guys. One of the guys in the group was a brand new Christian and he had been a very severe alcoholic. Now all of us Christian guys are gonna go to the bar and watch the game. We asked him, we're like, "Hey, would you come with us?" He's like, "Well, if you guys go, I can't go. I can't go to the bar." We said, "Why?" He said, "I can't be around alcohol. I'm an alcoholic. I'm a brand new Christian. Like I just joined Team Jesus. My blood alcohol is probably still not blowing a zero. I still got some in me." Now we had a few choices. Number one, we drag him to the bar, cause him to stumble. Number two, we just ditch him. Okay, forget about it. We'll be at the bar. Or number three, we could say, okay, let's go somewhere else and watch the game so we could all be together. What would the right answer be? Three. That's what we did. We found a restaurant that didn't have any alcohol and had the game on and we ate chicken wings. Now, had he struggled with chicken wings, I don't know what we would have done 'cause that's, that's a whole 'nother level of complexity. My guy! And what Paul is arguing for, ultimately, is this: you have your freedom in some area of your life you shouldn't use at all because in that area, you're weak and you're gonna get in trouble. And if somebody else is strong where you're weak, don't judge them, they're just stronger than you.

And in the areas where you are strong and someone else's weak, don't judge them. If you have to live behind the line, don't judge the people that live closer to the line and vice versa. If you live closer to the line, don't drag people who will get in trouble closer to the line. But at the end of it all, what he's saying is this, the way the world works is everybody needs to agree with me, everybody needs to be like me, everybody needs to do what I do or think how I think or feel how I feel and what God says is, in my family, we love each other and we're different. And some of the weaker brothers and sisters, they're like the younger brothers and sisters and some of the stronger brothers and sisters, they're like the older brothers and sisters. And you know what? We expect the older brothers and sisters to do what? To love and serve the younger brothers and sisters, because it's about being a loving family. And it's the ability to say, you know, issues matter, but people matter more. Now let me close with this. And then we will bring the band out. And I say this as a father, I've got five kids. My kids are different. I love each of my kids. God loves each of you. I want good for every single one of my kids. God wants good for every single one of you. All my kids have different personalities. You're God's kids, you've all got different personalities. My kids have all got different skills and abilities and you've all got different skills and abilities. God is a father. We're a family and he's trying to parent us. And what he's saying is brothers and sisters, love one another, serve one another. If God forbids it, the answer is no. Don't cross that line. But how you treat each other on this side of the line is really important. Let me bring the band out and I'll close with an illustration. How many of you have heard the section in Romans 14, don't cause a brother to stumble, to be used by legalistic religious people to create hypothetical scenarios where they can be religious and legalistic? Have you ever heard that? All right, we'll have a little fun. Okay, so let's do a case study on a birthday party, kid's birthday party, kid's birthday party. All right, you're all now on the kids' birthday planning committee. Congratulations, you made the kid's birthday planning committee. All right, so the first question is, should we have cake?

- Yes!

- No, there are some kids who are obese, they're weak when it comes to cake, we will cause them to struggle, to stumble. No cake! Okay. Now what about ice cream? Should we have ice cream?

- Yes!

- No. Because what if some Hindu kid comes? In the Hindu culture, the cow is sacred. That means the milk is sacred and this would desecrate their family history and it would violate their Hindu conscience. No ice cream! Not to mention, don't even get me started on lactose intolerant people. We are gonna cause them to lactose stumble. We cannot do this! So should we have presents?

- Yes!

- No! Because some kids are poor and they feel bad that they can't give the nice gift. We're

gonna cause them to economically stumble. The stimulus check from Biden didn't come to their house yet so they're unable to participate in the gift-giving. How about can we sing "Happy Birthday to You"? No, it's a secular song! What are you? Pagan? Good Lord, next thing you know, there'll be listening to heavy metal and smoking joints and going to Kiss concerts and wearing all black and growing out their fingernails and buying Converse and voting for socialists and celebrating Halloween. Oh, what the heck? It's a secular song! Should we celebrate the birthday at all? No! There's only two people, you people! There's only two people in the Bible that celebrated their birthday, Pharaoh and Herod, both godless pagans. And they beheaded John the Baptizer in Herod's birthday party. Do you want to behead God's people? Why in the world would you throw a birthday party? It's pagan. It's secular. Only godless people have ever done it in the history of the world. Some of you are like, "I didn't know all of that." Others of you are like, "I'm not gonna throw a birthday party." That was not the big idea. The big idea is this, that everything out there is largely neutral. What's in here is either good or evil. And you and I need to ask the holy spirit to speak to us so that we can live according to our conscience and convictions. And if we disagree with people, if they're not crossing God's line, guess what? We love them. We give them cake, ice cream, we sing "Happy Birthday", or we sing it in the Greek text to be biblical. And we allow people to have a little bit of liberty and a little bit of freedom and a little bit of diversity in the spirit. And let me just tell you this 4th of July isn't for America. It's for the kingdom of God. It's about freedom and liberty, living according to your conscience and your convictions, not violating God's word, but loving one another. Father, thank you for an opportunity to have some fun. And God, I confess I was a little untucked. I was a little, probably over wherever your line was. I, at least, danced on it vigorously. So thank you that Jesus died for people like me. And God, I pray that we would take Jesus seriously, but not ourselves; that we would take the scripture seriously, but not our opinions; that we would have deep, profound convictions, but the deepest and most profound would be to love people and to treat them like Jesus treats us. And so Jesus, we come to worship and as we do, we have different opinions and convictions and backgrounds and perspectives, and maybe even different rules that we live by. But as our voices come together, we're showing our unity to the Lord Jesus. And Lord Jesus, we just say, thank you. Thank you that you love us. Thank you that you pursue us. Thank you that you save us. Thank you that you endure with us. Thank you that you put up with us. Thank you that you patiently serve as a big brother until we all get before the father in whose name we pray, Amen.

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