**Victory Over a Heavy Conscience: Romans 14**

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**Intro:** When cultures and consciences clash!

Does the Bible teach us how to interact, live, and worship among believers who think and behave differently than we do?

**I. The Context:** Early Roman Christians were quarreling over:

- Whether to eat meat that violated Old Testament regulations (Romans 14:2)

- Which day of the week to worship or rest on (Romans 14: 5-6)

- Whether believers should drink wine or not (Romans 14:21)

Paul’s response to these conflicts gives us a roadmap / solution to navigate modern conflicts between cultures and conscience..

- Things our church experiences tension over: appropriate standards of dress, alcohol consumption, worship music styles, spending, permissiveness in parenting, entertainment content…

**II. Biblical DANGERS to Judging Brothers and Sisters Who Think Differently Than You do…**

- You are not authorized or qualified to judge other Christians (Romans 14:4)

- Living to please others distracts from your main focus (Romans 14:7-8,12)

- Your “normal” has the ability to lead others astray (Romans 14:15)

**III. Two Common, False Solutions:**

- The wide, seductive door of permissiveness (Romans 14:3)

- The narrow, obnoxious door of legalism (Romans 14:20-22)

**IV. Victory in Christ:**

- Living as ambassadors for a savior who calls us to demonstrate unity, righteousness, peace, and joy with each other (Romans 14:17-18)

**Conclusion**

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1. Share a story about a time when you encountered someone whose *ethnic* or *cultural* background had shaped them to think or act differently than you.

2. Work as a group to come up with some real or made up examples of how this same type of contrast might happen at LWEFC among people from different Christian backgrounds and traditions.

3. *KEY CONCEPT!* What does Paul mean in Romans 14 when he talks about those who are “weak in faith” and those who are “strong in faith” (base your definition off of the example that he gives - keeping or breaking outdated dietary laws based on their confidence in the Gospel).

4. What are some ways that Christians in our context and culture can be “weak in faith” (and rely on traditions and rituals and works instead of fully trusting the saving power of the Gospel)?

5. What does your group know about the diversity in the early church? What were the backgrounds represented? What principles does Paul give in this chapter to help diverse congregations thrive?

6. Can you think of other places in the New Testament where early Christians clashed because of their different backgrounds and ethnicity? Does God want a diverse church, or a segregated church?

7. Read and discuss Romans 14:15. This is a weighty teaching that is often ignored. How should this principle impact our behavior in these “gray areas” that reasonable Christians disagree?

8. How can you personally apply Paul’s main teaching from this passage (Romans 14:17-18)? How will these specific verses give you a roadmap or strategy for navigating through relational differences?

What is this specific passage asking diverse congregations to unify around?

How does a better understanding of Romans 14 change your thought process and behavior when interacting with Christians opinionated differently than you?