

# Life Group Questions

May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**A Transformed Life** – Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe – [Romans 14:1-12](#)

## Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups,

We're fast approaching summer when many Life Groups take a break. I want to know **THREE** things from y'all:

- A) How have you seen God at work in your group? Answered prayers? Are people growing deeper in their relationship with God? Evangelism leading to belief?
- B) What does your group need from God? Do you need His encouragement? Maybe hearts convicted to grow? Or directions to know where your group can serve?
- C) What summer does your group enjoy in the summer? Are there any places you like to go, events to attend, or activities to do?

Send me an email to let me know!

We have some events coming up! Men's Fellowship will discuss the Discipline of Fatherhood on May 18 (<https://willingdon.org/events/mens-fellowship-discipline-of-fatherhood/>). Sunday, May 19 is our International Language Ministries Festival (<https://willingdon.org/events/international2024>). There's a marriage workshop on May 25 by FamilyLife Canada (<https://willingdon.org/events/marriage-workshop-2024/>).

Pastor Jonathan Hsieh  
[jhsieh@willingdon.org](mailto:jhsieh@willingdon.org)

## OPENING QUESTIONS (Pick Any You Like)

### 1. What are different views of “doing” Christianity?

Here are a few I’ve seen that led to conflict and disagreement.

- Prioritize serving at church vs serving the community
- Attending every church event vs meeting outside of church
- Dressing in Sunday's best clothing vs casual clothes
- Praying in elevated KJVish language vs normal vernacular
- Doing quiet time in the morning vs at night.
- Being still while singing worship songs vs dancing and moving

### 2. What do you think of when you see people abstain from things because of their faith?

You probably know Christians who don’t drink alcohol, watch R-rated movies, or listen to music with profanity because they believe it dishonors God. Some may refuse to hang out with friends or play sports because they only do church gatherings on Sunday to observe the Sabbath. What’s your view of them?

As a kid in the 80s and 90s in Florida, homeschooling culture wasn’t as developed as it is now. I remember meeting those kids and thinking they were a few fries short of a Happy Meal. They seemed so out of touch, and this was coming from a nerdy dweeb.

My parents restricted us from a lot of stuff, but I would find ways around them using this new invention called the Internet using a 28.8 kbps modem and Netscape Navigator. Looking back, yes, those kids were weird. And the way the parents went about it may not have been the best. But at least they were trying to honor God, whereas I didn’t care.

### 3. Is it easy to get along with Christians who do things differently from you?

We have a big church with thousands of people. Not only that, we come from dozens of cultures. Even blends of cultures! I’m sure we have plenty of examples of people who pray, worship, or act differently than us. There’s likely someone in your Life Group who might fit the bill!

So, when you see them do things their way, is your first reaction curiosity or a wince?

## Romans 14:1–12

<sup>1</sup> As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. <sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. <sup>8</sup> For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. <sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; <sup>11</sup> for it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”

<sup>12</sup> So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

## LET'S DIG IN

### 4. Why can it be dangerous to pass judgment on others?

Paul writes elsewhere that we *should* judge within the church (1 Corinthians 5:9-13), so judging by itself isn't wrong. But if we judge wrongly, we can bring God's judgment on ourselves (Luke 6:37).

Let's see how we can integrate the Gospel into this answer. Here are some quick points of the Gospel. <sup>1</sup> God is perfect and has perfect laws that we fail to obey (Romans 3:23). <sup>2</sup> Because we broke God's laws and God is just, we must be punished (Romans 6:23). <sup>3</sup> But God loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross and take our punishment onto Himself (Romans 5:8). <sup>4</sup> We are only saved if we have faith in Jesus because we can't earn salvation (Romans 3:27-29).

**Wrong Standards.** It's dangerous to judge using our standards instead of God's. In this passage, Paul doesn't say which group is right. God doesn't care as much about the action because He cares more about the heart. When we use our own standards to judge people, we are sitting in God's seat.<sup>1</sup>

When my wife and I attended Willingdon before COVID, I remember a guy who sang and clapped off-tune and off from the beat. It could be easy to judge him and say he's a distraction. But I appreciated him. He wasn't going to win Canada's Got Talent, but he didn't care. His heart was bursting with joy he just had to let out.

**Wrong Motivation.** Let's say what they're doing is actually wrong. Is our goal to judge and condemn? Or is it to lovingly disciple, encourage, or restore? We need to remember that we are all sinners who deserve to be condemned by God.<sup>2</sup> But instead of punishing us, God sent His Son out of love to save us.<sup>3</sup> If we understand God's grace and love, we would want to extend grace and love to this person, too.<sup>4</sup>

So if we see someone doing something different, we can try to understand what they're doing. If it's right, we can appreciate it and their heart. If it's wrong, we can prayerfully seek a way to help them on the right track.

I appreciate this part of an article from Crossway (<https://www.crossway.org/articles/7-tips-for-loving-those-people-in-your-church>):

Essentially, [Paul] says, That person whose conscience you so strongly disagree with is also seeking to serve Christ. Very often we're told to understand the position of those we disagree with. That's important, but what Paul suggests is even better: How is their position motivated by love for Christ? As you see the faith of those you disagree with, you will be far better prepared to love them through disagreement.

**Wrong Relationship.** As Paul notes, they are our siblings (v. 10). When we judge our fellow Christians, it's like an older sister trying to parent a younger brother. Yes, there may be times when a parent deputizes one child to watch another, but it usually doesn't allow them to make their own decisions. That's up for mom or dad to decide when they get home. When we pass judgment we're assuming a role that God never intended.<sup>1</sup>

We need to remember that we're peers, evenly positioned under God.

### 5. How can you discern if a way to worship or honor God is wrong or simply different?

Nowadays, eating meat or keeping certain days special isn't as big of a deal. That doesn't mean we're out of the woods. We still need to work through stuff. There are obvious things Christians shouldn't do, like praying to Buddha or using the Force (<https://www.jedichurch.org/jedi-doctrine.html>). But what about something more controversial? Is someone wearing a suit and tie more spiritual than another in a T-shirt and joggers? Should we only sing psalms (exclusive psalmody), old hymns, or new songs to the Lord? Is someone who doesn't watch any

shows or listen to any music that's vulgar or sexual more righteous than someone who watches and listens with discernment? These have been spicy questions in Christian circles for a while.

Here are some steps I see from this passage.

**Figure it Out.** Paul writes that everyone "should be fully convinced in his own mind." We should think about what we do and why we do it. Through our different backgrounds and natural inclinations, we all lean towards something, so we could be doing something wrong. Let's be aware of what we do and why we do it so we know we're in the right.

Do you know some basic principles for setting up a quiet time? Why do you pray before you eat? Do you know what God wants you to do when you come to worship with other Christians or meet in a Life Group? We don't need to know every detail, but we should be convinced we're doing the right thing. If we aren't, we could be doing the wrong thing.

**Bible.** Paul quotes the Bible (Isaiah 45:23) to support his point. Does the Bible have instructions or restrictions on the issue? There are many actions in the early churches that God condemned because they violated clear commands or principles, such as how people celebrated communion (1 Corinthians 11) or forced men to be circumcised (Galatians 6:12-15).

Whatever the issue is, see what God says. Are there any relevant principles that may apply? Make sure to understand the context of the passage as well. People can get pretty whacky applying the Bible in ways it was never intended.

**Honor God.** Is the intention to honor God? Here are some examples and how I process them.

- **Worship Music.** There is no way Pastor Jerry and the Worship Arts Team can pick songs that please the thousands of people who worship with us every Sunday. An old Barna study found that only 29% of adults "view worship as something that is focused primarily on God. One of every five attendees admitted that they had no idea what the most important outcome of worship is." (<https://www.barna.com/research/focus-on-worship-wars-hides-the-real-issues-regarding-connection-to-god/>). For most, worship music is simply about personal preference.

Do I prefer this style or song because I believe it honors God or because I just like the sound of it? If I'm not into this musical style, can I still appreciate it because it still honors God?

There has been lots of chatter in Christian circles over big churches (<https://youtu.be/pOU-1S0L6YI>) and ministries (<https://youtube.com/shorts/b35y5JRrjQ>) with incredible production values. People really seemed to enjoy it, but it drew attention *away* from God.

- **Clothing.** Growing up people told me that God wants us to dress nice for Sunday, but that command is nowhere in the Bible. Dressing up or come-as-you-are can both honor or dishonor God. For example, wearing a proper dress can remind you to take God seriously, but it can also lead to compartmentalizing. If taking the dress off at home turns you from Super Spiritual Woman into Super Un-spiritual Woman, you may have a problem. Another potential issue with dressing nicely is that we can confuse outward appearance with spirituality. He dresses up so prim and proper for church, he therefore must be spiritual.

Dressing casually can remind you that you worship God 24/7. God sees you whether you're in your pajamas at home just as easily as He sees you at church. On the flip side, you could take God too casually.

Both dressing up or casually can equally be immodest. People may dress in fancier clothes and carry nice accessories (like jewelry, watches, purses, etc.) to show off their wealth or style. People may dress in more formfitting or revealing clothing to get people to notice their curves or gains. Either way, they're making people look at them, not God.

**Gives Thanks.** Does this build gratitude or bitterness? Here are some examples and how I process them.

- **Abstaining from Alcohol.** Many Christians don't drink because they believe it can lead to sin. We've all seen or heard stories of drunk drivers, guys getting inappropriately aggressive with ladies, or people making dangerous decisions because they've had too much beer. And the Bible does warn us about drunkenness (Romans 13:13). Does abstaining lead to thanking God for keeping them from the dangers of alcohol? Or are they jealous when they see Christians having a good time over some beers or glasses of wine?
- **Giving Money / Offering.** Some Christians believe they're required to give 10% of their income to God. Others believe God wants them to give based on their ability, which may be above or below 10%. Whatever the case, do we give with a cheerful heart (2 Corinthians 9:7)? Is giving to God another obligation, like paying taxes? Do we mournfully give to God while thinking about all the ways we could have used that money? Or do we give out of appreciation for what God has given us?

**Live for God.** Paul emphasizes that our lives belong to God. Our actions should honor the Lord (v. 6) because we live and die to the Lord (v. 7). Whether we live or die, we belong to God (v. 8). Jesus died so we could belong to Him (v. 9). Eventually we'll give account to Him (v. 12). So, is our mindset about how we can honor and love and live for God? When we're trying to honor God in what we do, it makes it easier to see how Christians doing things differently could be honoring God in their own way.

## 6. How can we build unity across differences?

The original Greek for welcome (προσλαμβάνω, pros-lam-ban-o) has a nuance of receiving into someone's home (BDAG). Early Christians didn't have church buildings with cafes or fellowship halls. They may have met in a public place as a big group, but they would break up to have meals in people's homes (Acts 2:46). Imagine welcoming someone in your home with whom you disagree.

It's easy to avoid someone you don't like at church. Pretend to be in a conversation or walk by quickly and hope they don't notice. Scope them out in the sanctuary and sit at the other end. We have three services, just go attend the one they don't go to. (I realize it sounds like I've thought a lot about how to avoid people and I may be giving people ways to do the opposite of what this passage is teaching. I'm trying to tell you what not to do!)

But it's different when that person is in your Life Group or they ask to tag along for lunch. How can you welcome them into the intimate spaces of your life? Paul doesn't say tolerate. He says welcome.

We can apply some of the things I've listed in previous questions. There are plenty of other possibilities as well, but I'm just going to focus on Paul's emphasis that we all belong to God.

**Remember Their Master.** They belong to God just as much as you do. God loves them and saves them from their sins the same way He saved you. That means they don't ultimately report to you and your opinion of them isn't the most important. Instead of arguing or beefing, we can love them like God loves them. If we feel they need to change, we can also ask God to do the work. Instead of taking differences personally, we can remember God has already welcomed them.

**Remember Our Master.** Since they belong to God and we belong to God, we're all family. Paul makes it clear when he calls that person a brother. I miss the days when my aunts, uncles, and cousins all came together to eat at a-gong and a-ma's (Taiwanese for grandpa and grandma). When we gather to worship or meet as a Life Group, we're a bunch of kids who come together only because we share the same Heavenly Father.

Instead of seeing them as an opponent or enemy combatant, they're family. A wise man once said, "I don't have friends, I got family." (<https://youtu.be/IQuc7wfO16Q>). In church, we don't have friends or enemies, we got family. And since they are our family, we go out of our way to serve them. In the next passage, Paul tells us to be willing to sacrifice so we don't cause others to stumble \*SPOILER\*.

**Remember Your Master.** We're also sinners in need of grace. We're also ultimately under God's authority so we should first be concerned about what God wants from us. Are we living right? We must remember to remove any 2x4s in our eyes before we pick dust out of others' eyes (Luke 6:37-42). We don't want to nitpick other people while neglecting the big stuff (Matthew 23:23-24).

# NOTES

## Breaking it Down

Paul moves from a general command to love to a specific type of scenario: what about people with different convictions? On one hand, there are clear black-and-white areas, like drunkenness and sex outside marriage (Romans 13:13). But there are plenty of areas where people may diverge without being wrong. Faith is complex and there are bound to be areas where Christians don't see eye to eye.

It's clear in the passage that the "stronger" and "weaker" people are Christians. The "weaker" have faith in Jesus, but likely they don't understand how their faith plays out in how they live. These people likely brought certain attitudes and patterns from their pre-Christian lives.

*Romans*, Morris – Those converted to Christianity in the first century did not come with minds like empty slates. They had had years of living in Judaism or in some pagan situation and in the process had acquired deeply rooted habits and attitudes. They did some things but avoided others. When they became Christians, all this did not drop away from them in a moment. For example, some pagans were so repelled by the self-indulgence they saw as an integral part of the world in which they lived that they turned from it all and lived ascetic lives, sometimes giving up the eating of meat altogether (Olshausen cites Seneca as one who did this). Jewish converts had kept the law of Moses, and specifically they had observed the Sabbath. When such people became Christians they often maintained such habits. They did not see that justification by faith made them irrelevant. It is people who brought from their previous life such habits of thinking and living of whom Paul is speaking.

Throughout the centuries of the Christian church there have been people like that, people who for reasons good or bad have seen certain actions as things they must do and others as things they must not do. And there have been others who have felt no compulsion either way; their faith has made them strong. It is this division (which is still with us) of which Paul writes.

The two areas Paul writes about are diet and holy days that impacted the church's ability to come together for fellowship over a meal or to worship together. Paul doesn't explain the details here, since (A) the Roman church was well aware of them and (B) the point of Paul's passage is that these details ultimately weren't the focus.

Some scholars believe the weak are Jewish Christians. Here are some possibilities for the struggles they may have had and how it could have made fellowship difficult.

### Food.

- **Pork.** Believers from a Jewish background didn't eat pork (Deuteronomy 14:8). Although Jesus declared that all foods were clean (Mark 7:18-23), many Jewish Christians had a hard time accepting it (Acts 10:9-16). Imagine avoiding pork your whole life, fearing it could harm your relationship with God. Then you sit down for a meal after church service and someone's eating a big porkchop in front of you.
- **Sacrificed Meat.** Christianity began with Jews but soon welcomed non-Jews. Early church leaders had to figure out how Jewish non-Jewish believers had to become. One change was not eating meat sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:29). This was likely from animals that were dedicated to a god, slaughtered at a temple, and then sold at the market. "Meat that enters the house of idol worship is permitted, and meat that

exits this house is prohibited, because it is considered as offerings to the dead” (Mishnah Avodah Zarah 2.3).

Paul addresses the “weak” at Corinth about this issue (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:14-22). Back then, Christians couldn’t look for the “PRIME GRADE ORGANIC GRASSFED 100% CERTIFIED IDOL-FREE BEEF” label, so any meat they bought could have been dedicated to an idol. “Weak” Christians might think that by eating dedicated meat they’re unwittingly participating in pagan worship. Even worse, what if they brought this tainted meat to a Christian gathering and got them involved? Better avoid meat altogether.

Jesus calls out the church in Pergamum for being cool with teaching that promoted eating food sacrificed to idols (Revelation 2:14).

- **Abstaining from Gentile Food.** Many Jews wanted to go the extra mile to remain pure after Antiochus Epiphanes tried to force people to eat unclean foods around 167 BC (4 Maccabees 4:26; 2 Maccabees 1:34). Faithful Jews could have followed them and other examples, such as Daniel and his dudes not eating the Babylonian king’s food or wine (Daniel 1:8-16).

### **Special Days.**

- Jewish Christians still celebrated the Sabbath and the feast days they grew up with. When we hear of Pentecost, we think of the day the Holy Spirit came down on the apostles, and 3,000 Jews believed in Jesus (Acts 2). The Jewish Christians weren’t in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost because they didn’t even know it was going to happen. Instead, they came to celebrate Shavuot (Feast of Weeks).