

Should a Christian Get Vaccinated?
Romans 14:13-23
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, January 23, 2022

If you guys would, please open your Bibles with me to the book of Romans. That's the book we're looking at today. And just so you know, this will be the last morning we're going to talk about a controversial subject, because it's not good to dwell on that for too long. It's good to talk about these things, some, but you do want to move on to other subjects. But if you remember, we started off this series talking about the topic of masks, or the law, which said that you have to wear one of those in order to come to church. And then we moved on to the subject of Bill C4, or the recent ban against conversion therapy, which said you cannot confront homosexuality in certain places, or else you'll get in trouble. But this morning, I just want to talk about one more item in the list before we move on. And that's the issue of vaccines. Some of the laws given today are saying that you need to get a shot in order to participate in society. And in order to do this, let's just read our passage for today because it sets the stage for our discussion. If you would, look at Romans 14 with me. It says,

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards everyday alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day observes it for the Lord, and He who eats does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not for the Lord does not eat and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord and if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead in the living.

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this--not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. I know and I'm convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.

Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offence. It is good not to eat meat or to drink

wine or do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not done from faith is sin.

We will stop the reading there. But as you look at that passage, you can tell that the word “vaccine” is not in here, because that was not an issue back then. They didn't even have that type of medicine in the day. But it does mention several other things that people wrestled with back then because it talks about food and holy days. You can see that in verse two and down in verse five. And just to say a few words about that issue. For one, it was a very hostile topic at the time. Now, vaccine is a very emotional subject today. And it had a lot of opinions. And we'll get into that, so it really relates to what we're dealing with here.

But to talk about the book a little bit, the book of Romans has been considered to be the greatest letter ever written in the Bible. Because it says more about our salvation than any other book. Martin Luther said, should a tyrant succeed in destroying the scriptures and only a single copy of the Gospel of John and the book of Romans remain, then all of Christianity would be saved. And he's right. All of Christianity is contained in this one little book. And the main ideas found back in chapter one, verse 16, if you just want to keep your fingers here, and turn back to Romans chapter one. This is the theme of the book. Down in verse 16, Paul says, “For I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” Key word is the word gospel. Because that's what the book of Romans is about. It tells us how we can be saved through the gospel or good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. And not only that, but it tells you the power of that. Because when you believe in Christ, this is what happens to you, your life begins to change; your whole world turns upside down. We live in a world today of people that are unhappy with their lives, and they're going to all types of things to change. They want to change their diet, want to change their psychology; they want to change their exercise routine, some of them want to change their family and marry somebody else. It doesn't work. Paul says the only thing that can save you is the power of God revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified on the cross and resurrected for our sins. Verse 17 says, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.” Righteousness means being right with God, being acceptable to Him. That's given from faith to faith, or from Christ to Christ, which leads us to chapter 14, because if you turn back there, Paul alludes to this when he says this in the first verse of chapter 14. He says, “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, or weak in Christ, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on him.” When Paul mentions the weaker brother here, he's referring to someone who is weak and all the things he's been talking about in the book of Romans. Because he's weakened his faith. He's frail, and his understanding of Jesus and His power to change you, because he believes in the cross, this weaker brother trusts in grace, but he's still caught up in his food. He's still wrapped up in things like what day he worships on and all the ceremonies and rituals from the Old Testament because he thinks that'll help him. We all know people who think that if I just try harder, God will accept me. If I just do more, and pray more and keep the Sabbath, he'll take me, and this guy was like that. And so Paul gives you this advice on how to handle them. If you look in verse 13, here's the advice. He says, “Therefore, let us not judge one another, but determine this, not to put an obstacle or stumbling block in a brother's way.”

Now, I'll talk about that passage in a moment, but that word, stumbling block, means something that tempts you to sin, or something that makes you fall over into it. You can see the word stumble in the word stumbling block, that's the idea. It's a really interesting picture here because the Jews didn't have paved roads back in the first century. Instead, the roads were covered in dirt, which means they were full of big rocks or stones that would

often wash in with the floods. And oftentimes if you were traveling at night, you would stumble over one of those and get hurt. They were called a stone block. Paul says it is the same way with the weaker brother here because he's traveling at night too. I mean, he's in the dark in a sense when it comes to certain issues, because he doesn't understand what Christ has done completely. His faith is very wobbly on this. And so Paul says, the last thing you want to do is make it worse by putting something in his way. Because he's trying to get to Christ, he's trying to get to the Lord; he's running hard after Him, and you're putting this big mess in his way. So he says to stop doing that. I mean, isn't this what the Christian life is about? The whole point of the Christian life is you don't want anything coming between you and Christ. Amen? That's the whole point of it. You don't want anything to get in the way between you and the cross. And here's what this means for us today. I mean, just like it was with the issue of masks, there are Christians today, who think they're sinning if they don't get a vaccine, right? You guys know what I'm talking about it, they genuinely, genuinely believe that they're disobeying God if they don't follow all the rules from the government, take all the shots, and then another, and another, and another and another. And at the same time, there are other Christians who feel like they are sinning if they do that. They think they're disobeying God if they take a vaccine because they think it's the mark of the beast, or they think it's a sign of the anti-christ. And here's what Paul is saying in this chapter. You have to catch this. He's saying they're both the weaker brother. He's saying they're both immature in the faith, because the Christian life is not about that. It's not about whether you keep a bunch of rules or not, it's not about whether you follow restrictions or don't follow them. It's about Christ. And that's all. It's about running to the cross. And that's what you need to be focusing on now. And as you do, you need to stop making the vaccine a stumbling block for people. If he's trying to get to Christ, leave him alone. If he's running hard after Jesus, let him run. Don't make an issue out of this.

This is not easy to do, because I don't have to tell you, the government is making a big issue of this right now. They're making it hard not to put this in someone's way as a stumbling block. In the fall of last year, the province of British Columbia ruled that all government employees have to be vaccinated in order to keep their job. They said they have to take the vaccine or else they'll be placed on unpaid medical leave, which came as a surprise to some people because there is a shortage of workers here right now. The economy's hurting but they made that decision in the interest of public health, which followed another law that said that you have to be vaccinated in order to go certain places, you have to do it in order to enjoy certain things like indoor sporting events, or concerts or restaurants that offer table service. So now it's not just hitting the employees, but the consumer as well. Which is leading some to say that we need to do that in the church. That's led some Christians to say, even though the government has not mandated it yet, even though they're not requiring it, we should check people's passports, vaccine passports at the door, or else turn them away. Which raises the question, well, what do you do with something like that? Well, I think the answer is simple. It's found right here in this passage. Paul says we shouldn't judge each other over something like that. We should make it a requirement to come to our church. I mean, these people were told not to do that with food. I think it applies to the same thing. If someone believes in Christ, if someone trusts in Him and His grace to give them life, they should be able to come here, whether they've been vaccinated or not. I know it's a controversial thing to say nowadays, because it can get you in trouble. But this is what the Bible says.

In fact, just so you don't miss this, Paul tells us the same thing another way, if you look down in verse 15, he says it from another direction when he says, "For if because of food your brother is hurt, you're no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died." And that means when you put something like food, or vaccines or shots above your brother, this is how you destroy him: you tear him down, because he's trying to be saved. And you're putting that in his path. So don't do something like that. He says later

on., if you look in verse 19, he says, "So then, we pursue the things which make for peace. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food." Now, he takes it one step further, and he says, "When you put these things in his way, this is what you're doing. You're tearing down a work of God, because God is working on this person. God is building him up, he's saving this man washing him, cleansing him sanctifying him of sin, and you're trying to stop it because you're saying none of that matters unless you do this. All of that is useless unless you follow my opinion." So you have to remember that and stop it.

You can look at the church like a fancy museum full of expensive artwork drawn by the hand of God, all over the walls, people's lives all over the walls of the museum. And when you act this way, this is what you're doing, you're going up to those pieces of art, and you're tearing them down off the wall and stomping on them. You're going up to those priceless pieces and you're ripping them to shreds. And it's a terrible thing to do because you're going against the purposes of God. And I mentioned this because I have to tell you, some people are so passionate about this issue right now that they forget; they are so worked up about this that they can't even talk about it without starting a fight. Because tempers are running high on this subject, people's blood start to boil. But Paul says you can't do that in the church. You can't let your blood boil over against each other here. Because it's your job to build people up and not tear them down. This is also important because everyone's so tired of this issue right now. People are so exhausted with it that they're losing patience and fighting for that reason, because we all have COVID fatigue. But Paul says that you can't be that way either. You can't lose your patience, because your hope is found in Christ. And it's your job to tell people about Him.

But the point is that in all these things, you have to strive for peace in the church. That's what matters the most to God. You know, when he was preaching his famous sermon series on the book of Romans, Donald gray Barnhouse tells a story about the time he came to this passage. And he asked a friend of his who was a missionary if he could write down all the ways a Christian could pursue peace in the church. And he was surprised because he said the guy took four hours to do it. He went to a room, locked the door, and didn't come out for the entire afternoon. But here's what he said when he was finished, he'd written almost a whole notebook of stuff. And he said, "We make peace in the church when we give up our rights and put others first and understand that the church is not about me getting what I want all the time." I'm sure it just would be revolutionary if they did that one thing. And he said, "We pursue peace when we trust each other and pray for each other and delight in each other's success instead of tearing each other down just because someone got ahead of me. Just because someone got to do this thing, and I didn't. We also pursue it when we use our gifts to serve each other in a joyful manner, in a gracious manner, not in a crusty way all the time. And we pursue peace when we make sure not to put any obstacles in each other's way. We do it when we don't make following God any harder than it is by adding a bunch of rules that are not found in the Bible. Following Christ is hard enough without making it harder by shoving our own opinion down everyone else's throat."

I don't know if you've ever noticed this, but just about every church in the New Testament wrestled with this because they all fought over something. If you look at the church today, and you say why is everybody fighting? Well, they did in the New Testament. And when you look at that, you find that the church in Corinth fought over leadership and the church in Galatia fought over the law. The Philippians fought over people in the Colossians fought over doctrine. In First Thessalonians, they fought over eschatology and the Romans fought over food. And Timothy fought over his age and Titus fought over genealogies. And James fought over money and John fought over heresy. And Jude fought over everything. The church in the book of Jude was just a mess, one chapter one mess after another. But it all goes back to this: people just couldn't give up their opinion. They all had to have it

their own way when they came to church. And so they fought over it, which is also why the New Testament is full of commands on making peace. Almost every book in there gives you some reminder to do that. So for instance, Hebrews 12 Verse four says, "Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." And that's a humbling verse there because the author says, "Strive for peace with everyone." That means the vaccinated and the unvaccinated. The masked and the unmasked. You need to do it for every single Christian. First Corinthians seven, verse 14 also says, "For God has called you to peace," which means this is your calling now. This is what God brought you to when you're saved. It isn't just about doctrine. The Christian life is not just about having all your T's crossed and your I's dotted. It's important. But the thing that matters the most is how much you love each other. Matthew five verse nine says, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Galatians five verse 22 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is peace." Colossians three verse 15 says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." You get the idea. peace is important to God and it should be the same way for us as well. It can be so easy to get caught up in all the controversies right now surrounding this because every time you turn on the news, that's what you see. It's just one battle after another. But we want to be careful not to let the battles take over the church.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at three ways to make peace, on the issue of vaccines. So if you're taking notes today, that's our outline, we're going to look at three ways to make peace with each other on the issue of vaccines. Because that's what the church does. That's its mission; it doesn't exist to fight over stuff like this. We aren't here for you to come in and holler and yell and squabble with each other like they do on the news. It's got to be different in here. Now, please hear me out. I'm not saying you shouldn't be careful when you come to church and wear a mask if you need to wear a mask and get vaccinated if you need to get vaccinated and take the proper precautions, because you should. We've had several people in our church who have come down with a Coronavirus, and they've gotten really sick. So despite what some may tell you, this is a serious thing. And I'm not saying you don't have the right to defy the government in some of this as well and say I don't want to take the vaccine because you do have a right to refuse. We we've all seen studies that say this medication can cause complications for some people. And you need to see your doctor and talk with him about that.

What I'm saying is that you shouldn't come into church in order to boss everybody around on this and tell people what to do. That's not our job. And besides, if you start telling people they have to get vaccinated in order to come to church, how far do you take it? Do they have to get single vaccinated or double vaccinated? Do they have to get the Pfizer vaccine or the Moderna one? One booster shot? Two booster shots? Three booster shots? Four? Do they have to get tested three days before they arrive? I mean, the thing goes on and on. Do we give the deacons permission to tackle them at the door? The Bible doesn't say you have to do all that in order to be part of the church. We just have to trust in Christ, which is what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at three ways to make peace over this issue of vaccines.

And the first one is to give up your preferences. We've already said a little bit about this one. But I want to say more, because the first way to make peace with each other on the issue of vaccines is to give up your preferences, which means you shouldn't let your opinions get in the way and become a stumbling block for someone else. We've all got our opinions and that's okay, that's human nature. Nothing wrong with that. But you can't let it come between you and your brother in Christ. If you look in verse 13, Paul says it like this: "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determined this--not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. I know and I'm convinced in the Lord Jesus and nothing is unclean in itself, but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it's unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you're no longer walking according to

love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.” As you read that, you see that the passage starts off with the word “therefore”, Which means therefore in light of all I've said so far, this is what you need to do. And what he said can be summed up back in verse two. If you want to look up in verse two in the chapter, Paul summarizes it this way. He says, “One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.” So in other words, this is about eating. The controversy in Rome was all about food. Our controversy today is about the Coronavirus. This is what theirs was about because the Jews were very finicky about their diet. They're very picky because the Old Testament forbade the consumption of certain animals. God said you couldn't eat certain things like a pig or a frog because it was sin. Now we don't know why it said all that at least I'm not aware of why, but it was a major part of life in ancient Israel because the Jews were told to excommunicate someone who didn't do that. They were told not to have anything to do with them, because they were unclean. And the idea was that to eat something unclean made you unclean on the inside, made you ceremonially defiled before God. And so the people took that very seriously. Verse two says some of them took it so seriously that they became vegetarians over that. They just didn't want to eat any meat at all.

Verse five, if you look, also gives you another issue they were struggling with when it says that one person regards one day above another and another regards everyday alike. And that's referring to another custom the Jews had of keeping holy days on the calendar. They had about six of them throughout the year that they were commanded to follow in the Old Testament, like the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles and the Passover. And when you included all the extra ones that were added later on, it grew to a much bigger list, because then you had the Feast of Hanukkah and the Feast of Purim. To the point that all that took about three months out of the year for them, about 1/4 of their life was spent celebrating all that. So when they got saved, you can imagine they had a hard time giving it up; it was it was tough to turn a corner and just drop all that. And everybody had a preference, everybody had an opinion. And they all started a blog on Facebook. Some wanting to keep this day and some want to keep that one. Some wanting to eat this, some going to eat that. And so this was Paul's advice on how to deal with it. He says, “Therefore, let us not judge one another.” In other words, cut it out, stop being so picky, stop getting onto each other. But instead, he says rather determined this, not to put an obstacle or stumbling block in a brother's way.

Like I said earlier, that means don't put something in their way that keeps them from coming to Christ, don't put something in their way that makes it harder for them to be a Christian, because it's hard enough already, when you come from that background. It was tough enough already for the Jews to come to Christ. Because when they got saved, they had to leave their family and the friends and the neighbors behind. They had to cut ties with all that they know. And so Paul is saying, don't be so tough on them. If they want to cling to something like this, show some grace. Be patient. Because yes, you have the freedom to eat whatever you want. And you have the freedom to ignore the food laws, but they don't get that yet. They don't understand. So take it easy on them. Verse 14 says, “I know and I'm convinced in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself.” That means I know no food is unclean. I, Paul, the Jew of Jews and Pharisee of Pharisees, who was circumcised on the eighth day, and of the tribe of Benjamin, and a rabbi, I have that conviction, but my brother doesn't. He still thinks it's wrong to eat a pig. And so that's okay. Because to him who thinks is unclean, to him, it's unclean. And that means this is an issue of his conscience. He really trusts this deep down in his heart, but he's not hurting anybody. He's not causing any problems. So just leave him alone. Verse 15, says, I'm not going to destroy him over that. And the word “destroy” here is a strong word in Greek, because it means to totally obliterate someone or bring them to ruin. The idea of setting off an atomic bomb inside their heart, where you think they're fine, they're going along doing okay in the

Christian life, they have no problems until you swoop in and criticize. You jump in and say you're not doing fine, because you're not doing this thing like I am. Paul says, that's a terrible thing to do.

And here's what it has to do with this topic of the vaccines; it's the same way when it comes to this issue. Because you don't want to destroy your brother over this. You don't want to see him going along doing fine. And then you criticize him and take the wind out of his sails and obliterate him. It's not worth it. You can just leave him alone in this too, because God doesn't care if you get vaccinated or not. I mean, I can't say that enough. He doesn't care. If you wear a mask, He just cares about why. He just cares about you. He cares about your salvation, and it's the same way with your brother. So we need to be humble about this and stop pointing fingers all the time. You know, I don't have to tell you that there's a lot of that going on right now. People are pointing a lot of fingers at each other. We heard in the men's Bible study yesterday about some arguments that broke out at Tim Hortons about this. It's not unusual. In fact, it wasn't that long ago that one of the main leaders of our country went on national television and called unvaccinated people racist and misogynist, because he said it was their fault. The virus was spreading and people were getting sick despite the fact that Canada is one of the most vaccinated countries in the world. 82% of the population have received at least one dose of it. But he said that because that's a sentiment of many people. They think the unvaccinated people are unclean. You see the connection here to this passage. They think they're defiled and dirty in the eyes of God. And they need to be herded into camps. And Paul says, that's not right, because you're making this a stumbling block for people. They're trying to get over here, and you're putting this massive thing in their way and saying you have to jump over it just to get to the Lord.

You know, I haven't told you this before, but the word "Lord", or "God" or "Christ" is mentioned more than 20 times in this chapter to remind you that this is what it's all about. This is what really matters in the Christian life. It's all about Christ. It's like Paul is talking about this really sensitive subject of food and he keeps putting Christ in there to get your mind back on Him. Yeah, there's this controversy with food, but Christ. Yeah, there's these issues with the holy days, but Christ. Yeah, there's these problems with the Jews, but Christ. It's the only thing that matters. Back in verse 14, Paul says, "I know, and I'm convinced, in the Lord Jesus said, nothing is unclean to eat." And that means that I know and I understand it logically from the Bible, that God has declared all foods safe. And I'm convinced of it. That means it's a settled thing in my heart but I'm not going to force it on somebody else. Because to him who thinks it's unclean, it's unclean. My brother has a conscience just like I do. He has a heart just like me, and he has a freedom to make up his own mind. And I need to show him some respect in these things. And story is told at the time when George Whitfield was arguing with John Wesley about the doctrine of election and then he died. George Whitfield passed away and several of his family members asked John Wesley to preach at his funeral. And while they were there at the funeral, someone asked him if he if he thought he would see George Whitfield in heaven. And John Wesley said, "No, I don't because I think he'll be standing too close to the presence of God." Friends, that's how you need to look at this issue today. The people you disagree with in the church about the Coronavirus will be standing in the presence of God one day. And some of you won't see him because they'll be too close. They're your brothers. This is a family thing, so there should be no doubt in our minds, there shouldn't be no doubt in their minds that we love them.

Which brings us to another way to make peace with God over this issue of vaccines. And it goes right along with that one. And that is, to keep your priorities straight. So the first one is to give up your personal preferences. Don't let opinions get in the way of this thing. The way some people act, this is the farthest thing from their mind because they love to talk about their opinion when they come to church; it's their favorite thing to do. So you don't ever have to wonder what they think about something, they tell you before you ask. Paul says that's actually

dangerous, because it can start a fight. So we need to go easy on giving others our opinions. And it brings to us a second way to make peace with each other over the issue of vaccines. And that is to keep your priorities straight, which means you need to keep the main thing the main thing. Don't let yourself get distracted by all this other stuff that we've been talking about. And if you look back in verse 13, Paul writes, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determined this--not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. I know and I'm convinced in the Lord Jesus and nothing is unclean in itself, but to him and thinks anything to be unclean, to him it's unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you're no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore, do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men." If you notice, Paul starts this section off the same way that he started the previous one with the word "therefore" in verse 16. That means therefore, in light of what I've said, now about putting a stumbling block in someone's way, this is what you should do. Do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil and that's kind of complicated the way it's worded there, but it means don't let a good thing like your freedom to eat whatever you want be spoken of as evil. Because freedom is a good thing. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free, right? We've been called to freedom only don't let yourself be taken again under a yoke of slavery. But it's bad if you fight over it. Your freedom is wrong if you tear someone down, so don't do that. Paul says, use it for something else instead.

And to help you with this, he says in the next verse, "For the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking." That means it's not made up of those things. When you get to heaven, God's not going to ask you what you had for dinner. It won't come up. He won't ask you what's sitting in your fridge because He doesn't care. Instead, he'll want to know about your righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And those are all attitudes of the heart, they have to do with how you treat each other. Because that's what matters the most to God. It's a really stupid thing to be fighting over your sandwich, when you're sinning against your brother. One commentator said, "God doesn't care about the externals as much as he cares about the eternals and the Christian life." He doesn't care about your stomach as much as he cares about your soul, and you have to do the same. That's what he's getting at here. Verse 18, says, "For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God." And that means he who focuses on his righteousness and focuses on his peace and focuses on his joy instead of all this other stuff, that's the man God approves of. Not the one who talks about his diet.

And when you turn to the pages of the New Testament, one thing that jumps out at you in this whole conversation is, you don't see anything about food in there. Now you see it in the Old Testament, talked about quite a bit. You see it in the law to the Jews. But in the New Testament, they don't have a list of clean and unclean animals. But instead, you find things like this, you find the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians five. "For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self control." And then you turn over to Ephesians four, and you see the put off put on list, which says that when you come to Christ, you need to put off lying and put on truth, and you put off anger and put on kindness, and you put off stealing and you put on work. But the point is that that's what God is focusing on now. That's what His priorities are. He cares about the spiritual things. He wants to know what's going on inside of you. He wants to know that your heart has been changed, and your soul is different, and you're turning away from sin. He wants to know that you're praying more and worshiping more and dealing better with your family. He wants to know that you're humble, and gracious, and teachable, and in short, He wants to know that you're being sanctified. Because it's one thing to change your diet. But it's another thing to change all that. It's one thing to fix your food and stop eating certain things, but it's another thing to fix your attitude and stop shouting at people when they disagree with you and stop losing your temper every time.

Something doesn't go your way that's harder. That's a supernatural thing. But that's what glorifies God the most. To say it another way to explain this, theologians have come up with a term that's called the continuity principle, which means that in the church, some things continue from the Old Testament, they carry over. Because we still worship God in both Testaments, I mean, that hasn't changed. And we still preach the Word and sing songs and pray, but we don't kill animals anymore. In fact, when someone tells me that they keep the Old Testament law, I asked them, "Well, did you bring a goat to church today? Did you shed their blood on the altar?" We don't do that so that whole way of thinking has to change for us. Because there's been a shift in human history, there's been an adjustment in the way God deals with the world. And Paul says here that you have to adjust with it and stop focusing on external things so much. I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but there's a reason Christians don't all look the same and act the same and talk the same when they come to church. And there's a reason we don't all dress alike. And that's because God doesn't care about that anymore. That was something Israel had to do for certain purposes. But now it's different. He just wants us to love each other. And here's what this has to do with the topic of the vaccine, and that is that this is not a priority for us anymore, either. Not a big one. We all have to think the same way about this when we come to church. Because the kingdom of God is not about vaccines, but about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. It's not about whether you get a booster shot or not, it's about love and joy and peace. So that's what's got to be on your mind. Listen, friends, we'll be really blunt about this. If I haven't been blunt enough already, the vaccine does not make you right with God. I mean, the booster shot doesn't get you right with God. Because the pagans do that. They get vaccinated all the time. In fact, they're better at it than we are. But it doesn't save them. It doesn't make you a Christian. Because it takes more than that to be saved. We've all met people right now who don't understand that because they think that they're saved just because they were vaccinated. They're right with God just because they got a shot. Because they're stopping the second Armageddon or something like that. That's not what Paul says here. He says, there's not a shot in the world that can save a man like that, because it doesn't penetrate your heart. It doesn't go into your soul. That's how God saves a man. God gives you a shot on the inside, not the outside.

We've also met people right now who don't understand this because they thought it made them better than everyone else. They get the vaccine and they think it gives them the right to look down on people and judge them. But that's not right either. But in order to see that there needs to be a change in the way you look at all this; there needs to be a shift in your priorities from the outside of a man to the inside of one. That's what being a Christian is all about. It's not about your vaccination status, one way or the other. It's about your spiritual status. It's not about your standing on the outside, but on the inside. It's interesting when you study church history, one thing you find is that the reason the church has fought so much in the past is because they've neglected this. They've misunderstood that God focuses on the spiritual side of things, which is why they get so caught up in things like music and clothes and food. And that's why they fight about smoking and dancing and movies, and tattoos and earings and hair and makeup, and the Sabbath and Bible translations and politics, and church polity and money and building funds and chairs and the color of the carpet and the chandelier hanging from the ceiling. And as a result of that it's gotten everything off balance. I'm afraid if we're not careful, we can do the same thing with the vaccine. We can make it the defining issue in the life of the church. And it's not. This is not our hobbyhorse, this is not our pet peeve. We have more important fish to fry.

Francis Schaffer said that one thing he's observed among Christians throughout the years is that the things that we fight over do not spring from a lack of truth, as much as they spring from a lack of love. He said people will remember what you said, but how you said it. And the things that stick with people years after a fight is not the topic as much as the violence with which you fought over it. And that's what needs to change.

I'll never forget the time a friend of mine told me he became a Christian because he stopped drinking alcohol. But he was so proud about it. He's fought with everybody over this. So I told him that that doesn't make you a Christian, it makes you a Muslim. That's what they do. They don't drink alcohol. I said, "Tell me what do you think about Christ. That's what makes you a Christian." That's all that matters to us.

And it brings us to one more way to make peace with each other on the issue of vaccines, just to review these other ones. The first one is to give up your preferences. And secondly, you need to keep your priorities straight because if you don't, you'll act like all those other churches that get caught up in all these other things. In fact, I've talked to some people in our church who have come from places like that, and you've told me it was miserable. Because you felt like he never measured up. No matter what you did, it was not enough for people and Paul says you want to make sure not to do that to somebody else. If you know how miserable it is to be put into a legalistic box don't put someone else in that brings us to one more way to make peace. On the issue of vaccines and that is to pursue the things that make for peace. A third way to make peace with each other on the issue of vaccines is to pursue it, which means you have to chase after peace, you can't sit still and then hope it'll come for you, you got to go out and get it. It has to be something you actively do. And if you look in verse 19, Paul writes about this, and he says, "So then we pursue the things which make for peace, and the building up for one another." That's another one of Paul's statements here that show that he's building an argument because he's given you two "therefore's" in the passage. And now he gives you a "so then", which is a purpose clause, it shows you the purpose of all this. Here's the reason Paul put Romans 14 in the Bible, so then we can pursue the things that make for peace. In other words, peace is the goal in all this. That's what it's all about. And the word for peace here is the Greek word *eirene*, which refers to something that gives you a sense of safety and security. That's what people need to find when they come to church. It needs to be a safe place, so to speak, there needs to be some security here, because we're not as crazy as all the people out in the world. The chaos and madness needs to stop when you come into this room. And Paul says, in order for that to happen, you have to pursue it. In other words, the peace is not going to fall down magically from the sky, not going to rain on you from heaven, you have to make it happen yourself. And this word, it's in the continuous tense in Greek, which means that it should be a continuous thing for you. In other words, you pursue the peace over and over and over again, you do it day by day, Sunday, by Sunday, week by week with people. And it's also written in a way that shows intensity or depth of feeling. Because you have to do this fervently as well, otherwise, it won't work. This has to be a passion for you.

And in order to do that, Paul gives you some tips in the rest of the chapter. If you look in verse 20, here's one of them. He says, "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they're evil for the man who eats and gives offense." That means all food is clean, it's all safe to eat. Unless it offends somebody, then it's not. At that point, when it offends somebody and starts a fight, you've crossed the line. You've gone from something that's neutral and safe. And it's no big deal to something that is a big deal. Now it's wrong. And Paul says you can't do that. He says in verse 21 that it's good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. In other words, it's better to leave the food off all together, rather than hurt somebody just leave it in the fridge. Don't bring it to church. Just to give you some background on this, we don't really do this as much today, but the early church would have what they called love feasts. They weren't really potlucks, they were a little different than that. But there was a time when everyone came together and shared a meal. And it was a big event because most of the people were starving. That's why our potlucks are a little different. Some of you guys say I'm starving before this potluck but it's not the same thing. So they would go

there with a great anticipation, they really look forward to it because it was more food than they saw all week, which would give them joy until somebody thought about it. They'd be really excited and just thrilled to the chance to have that blessing until someone brought something that made you mad because he thought it was unclean. So Paul says out of love for them, don't do that. Just leave certain things at home.

Verse 22, says "The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God." That means that there are certain convictions that we all have to make about these things. There's certain decisions that we all have to come to when it comes to the issue of food and diet and vaccines. Because God is not creating robots here. He's not turning us into machines that all look alike and act alike and talk alike. But you have to remember when it comes to those decisions, it is a personal thing. You make it on an individual basis. So you can't force your opinion on someone else. Your conviction is your conviction. His conviction is his conviction. The word conviction here is not in the actual Greek, so the verse could be translated "the faith which you have, have is your own" and that's a good way to render it. Because the point here is that my faith is not the same thing as your faith. My convictions are not the same thing as your convictions. They need to be on some things like the Trinity and the doctrine of salvation, but not on this. It's been said that we all have to put up certain fences in the Christian life, we all have to put up certain barricades in order to protect ourselves from sin. But my fences may not be the same thing as your fences. And my barricades may not look like your barricades, and that's fine. Unless I'm a jerk about it. That's okay, unless I go up to your fence with a sledge hammer and try to break it down.

Here's how this applies: We don't have to agree on the issue of vaccines either. We don't have to see eye to eye on this. As long as we're not a jerk about it. As long as we don't take a sledgehammer and try to knock someone's fence down. Because we have freedom to make our own decisions on this, we have liberty to make a choice. Personally, I took the vaccine a year ago, because it made it easier for me to cross the border. It had been two years since I'd seen my family in the United States. I really missed them. I hadn't eaten at Chick-fil-A in a long time so I did it just so I could see them quicker and get back here with you guys. And that was it. But I know there are people in our church who really struggle with this. They can't bring themselves to do it and out of love for them I don't want to ever put them in a place where they feel like they're doing something wrong in making that decision because they're not. And I don't want to ever make them think that they're sinning and disobeying God because they're not. Because the faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God and all things are clean, but they're evil for the man who gives offence. So the only thing I want to do in this is not give offence. I don't want to go up and pick a fight. Listen, friends, make no mistake, there is a place to fight in the Christian life. And there's a place to take a sledgehammer to certain things and defend certain things and battle over them like truth and doctrine and Bill C4. Someone asked me if I was nervous about preaching Bill C4 last week. And I said not really because I think this is what's going to happen in about four years, someone's going to go on social media and listen to it. And then come back and take me to court. But you know what? That's fine. There's a time when you don't mince words on things. There's a time when we're very clear that this is right. And this is wrong. And that's the way it is. But we don't have to do it on everything. You don't have to do it on this. Some folks think they're brave when they stand up on everything. Paul didn't do that.

You can imagine Paul is a former Jew telling other Jews that all food is clean. You know what that would have been like? They take him out in the backyard and stone him. But it's true. He was bold. But he picked and choose his battles. The same way here. So listen, this is what it looks like friends. If someone comes in here and says I think I need to get vaccinated. I believe that's important to me. Do you know what you need to say? You need to say okay, that's it. Okay. God be with you. And if someone else comes in here, and they say, you know, I don't

think I need to get vaccinated. It's not for me, you know, what you need to say? Okay. The most important thing is for you to honor their conviction, you need to uphold their right to do what they decide in their own heart, because that's what the stronger brother does. The stronger brother does not stand up for his conviction, he stands up for other people's convictions. He doesn't stand up for his preference, in his opinion, the way he wants it to be, he stands up for them. That's why when some people come in the church, and they want to demand everything, I know automatically, they're the weaker brother, the stronger brother doesn't do that. In fact, just to get practical here, I can tell you that as an elder board, we've talked about this and while we want to be compliant with the government, and we want to obey because the Bible tells us to submit the governing authorities, I will say if they tell us that you can't come to church unless you get vaccinated, we're not going to do that. That's where we'll draw a line. And that is because we believe what this passage is saying, and that is that you have the right to come to church. If you trust in Christ, that's all. I know the world doesn't think they're doing anything wrong when they consider passing things like this. But in the sense of trying to put back to the Old Testament, and take you back to the time when you have to follow certain rules in order to come to God. And that's the last thing we want to do. We want you to come as you are.

And just to be clear, maybe to calm things down a little bit, this is not a law yet. If you're worried about this, and it concerns you, let me remind you, the government is not said that you have to be vaccinated in order to come to church. So don't get too worried about that. We're just saying this is how we would respond if it ever happened. So let's pray that it is not. A story is told of the time the city of Chicago was changing during the ministry of Warren Weirsbe in the 1970's because people were coming to Christ. They were coming in droves. But at the same time, they were fighting and arguing and bickering about certain things. So someone asked him why. Why do you have all these people coming to Christ, and they're fighting? In reply, he said, "When the light shines brightest, it often draws a lot of bugs." Friends, I tell you that story to remind you don't be a bug today. Don't be a person who has to fight about everything. Just let the love of Christ and the light of Christ shine through. Amen? Will you do that today? Let me pray for you that you would and Christ would be glorified.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this great salvation that we've talked about in the book of Romans and the fact that our sins are forgiven. We don't have to go to a priest. We don't have to go to a temple. We don't have to shed blood. The blood has been shed, once and for all. And Lord, that needs to govern all our thinking in all things and always as a church. Father, we're so thrilled at the fact that you've forgiven us in Christ. We're so humbled that you would take sinners like us and receive us and take us in. And Lord, would you help us to put that first and foremost in our minds in all of these discussions? Because Father, we're living in a world where things are getting more and more complicated; they are getting more and more violent, they're getting confusing. Because we're being told certain things that are hard to figure out. But in all of this, Father, we know we have a Saviour. And Lord, I do pray that You would help us to be unified as a church moving forward when it comes to the issue of vaccines, or masks or those types of things, and that we would learn how to be the stronger brother who looks out for someone else. It's not easy, Lord. We all come from different places, and we have our own emotions on this. But if we remember what You have done in our lives, it makes us easier to show grace. You have given us grace we can give grace. You have given us mercy, we can show mercy.

May we remember that moving forward, Lord. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about these things. Thank you for the boldness of a man like Paul, that would put a chapter like this in the Bible that might have cost him his life. We go out and do the same and give you honor and glory in all these things. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.