

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
September 14, 2014**

Romans 14:1-9

FREEDOM

- 1. An important word = *Adiaphora***
- 2. Why these things don't matter**
- 3. Yet, why they are important**

Hymns: 242 – 392 – 764 – Closing: 238

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Romans 9:1-5 –

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

The Revolutionary War

The Civil War

The War of 1812

The Texan War vs. Mexico

The French Revolution

Conflicts in South Africa

The Ionian Revolt, and other ancient Greek and Persian wars

What do all of these conflicts have in common? All these wars were waged to seek freedom. A nation or race was suppressed by another, and blood was shed and lives lost in the cause of freedom.

Freedom is an important facet of life that many have striven for down through history. We could have named countless wars and conflicts that have been waged in the name of freedom.

As we continue our sermon series from the book of Romans, today we arrive in chapter 14 and hear the Apostle Paul speak about freedom. However, we will see that this involves something much more important than political freedom. His inspired words are spoken in the context of spiritual freedom.

1. An important word = *Adiaphora*

As we examine these verses today, we have to know an important term and concept that Scripture teaches. The important concept is “adiaphora.” This strange word is well worth you remembering.

What is adiaphora? It comes from a Greek word that literally means “no difference.” Adiaphora are matters that do not make a difference whether you do them or not. They are not sinful in whether you do them or not, in and of themselves. If you have some German blood running through your veins, you might be interested to know that in German you call these “Mitteldinge,” the “middle things.”

The reason they are called this is that these matters lie between the two great commands of God: DO! And DON'T DO! God has said “Do!” when it comes to a great many things:

- Do respect your parents and elders
- Do help your fellow man keep his rightful possessions

- Do be a faithful spouse
- Do worship the Lord
- Do speak well of others
- And more

God has also told us “Don’t!” when it comes to many activities:

- Don’t steal
- Don’t hate
- Don’t slander
- Don’t have idols
- Don’t be greedy
- Don’t curse and swear
- And many more

In between the “Do’s” and “Don’ts,” there lies a wide field of activities that are not wrong in and of themselves.

For example, in the church at Rome there was a great potential for problems in a number of these areas. The church was made up of Jews, many of whom were accustomed to the Old Testament laws of Moses, and there were many Gentile converts to Christianity, who had not lived under those laws. Paul mentions two possible instances where adiaphora could be a problem:

- One was in the area of diet. Should a person eat meat? Or should a person simply eat vegetables?
- The other had to do with “sacred days.” How should a person view and honor special religious days?

Why did these have the potential to cause problems and offense? First, when it came to meat the Old Testament laws of Moses were very specific. God had legislated that Old Testament Israelites were not to eat pork and certain kinds of seafood. That was Old Testament law if you lived in that time.

Another hang-up with meat was that sometimes the meat sacrificed to pagan idols was later cut up and sold in the marketplace. Could a Christian eat that meat in good conscience? The answer was that it’s meat! It certainly was not sinful. But if your personal conscience was bound not to eat it, you certainly could avoid it if you chose to.

Then there were the issues with sacred days. It should come as no surprise to you that the Old Testament Sabbath laws had to do with Saturday, not Sunday. For centuries, God’s people rested and worshiped on Saturday. Not only that, they had a year’s worth of festivals they were to keep, including the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Passover, and many more. The Christians in New Testament times had seen fit to change the day of worship from the Old Testament Sabbath day to Sunday, the day Christ rose from the dead. This was a matter of adiaphora. Yet can you imagine the hubbub that this may have caused with people who didn’t understand adiaphora? Today, if you want to get people excited in a congregation just change the worship times. Or even more “controversial,” change the day of worship!

We can imagine the reactions that occurred in the first century because of this FREEDOM that God’s New Testament people now live in.

2. Why do these things not matter?

Why did these things “not matter?” Paul puts it this way: *“He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.”*

The key reason these things did not matter to the Romans and to us as well, is because of Christ. Christ changed everything when he came and performed his ministry of salvation for us. Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. Because of his perfect life and sacrificial death, we are saved! Our sins have been paid for and we have a place in heaven!

So why did God give Old Testament laws through Moses? Their purpose was to keep their minds and lives focused on God’s promise

of the Messiah to come. With the coming of the Messiah, things changed as he fulfilled and abolished those Mosaic laws. In Colossians 2 Paul writes: *“God forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross... Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”*

All of those daily, dietary, and ceremonial laws were only for the preparatory time of the Old Testament. They were for believers looking forward to the coming of the Messiah as they prepared their hearts. These laws also served to keep the nation of Israel distinct and separate from the nations around them.

Therefore, it was now fine to eat foods now that were considered “unclean” for many centuries of the Old Testament. Read through Acts 10 later today, for a good lesson on this. Therefore, Paul says that you can eat meat to the Lord or you can eat vegetables to the Lord. You can keep one holy day to the Lord or consider other ones holy to the Lord. You are acting in faith as you do everything in your lives “to the Lord.”

Another effect of Christ is that he has united us all under this most important fact, the gospel of our salvation. He has shown us what is most important and leads us to realize this. His amazing grace and the message of the cross is what we are united in. The other things “don’t matter” in and of themselves.

Finally, Paul also says that we only have one Lord and Master, Christ himself. In these indifferent matters, we are not to play the judge because we are not the Judge. Everyone answers to the Lord for his own actions. Again, realize we are not talking about sinful activities that a Christian should speak up about. We are talking about adiaphora. In the end, only the Lord judges our motivations and actions in this area.

They don’t matter. We have FREEDOM.

3. Yet, why are they important?

Although these are indifferent matters, however, we never would want to say that they are unimportant matters. The way that we use our Christian FREEDOM is very important. Paul says, *“The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”* **They will be important, because we will all need to live in peace and harmony as God’s people in a congregation.**

This fact will matter in four different ways that we should recognize today:

1. Think for a moment about the diversity of people here at Holy Trinity:
 - We have people of all ages
 - We have people of various backgrounds, whether it’s from Midwest families and congregations or West Coast families. We have people who have been longtime members of churches and people who are newer to the faith. We have people who have been members of larger, formal churches and others from smaller, more casual church settings.
 - We also are blessed to have people of many different cultures in our church: People of European descent, Koreans, Sudanese, Hispanic, African-American, and more!

This blessing can create challenges in understanding each other’s adiaphora.

2. Therefore, we must be wise in our use of Christian FREEDOM. We may very well have FREEDOM to do something in our Christian lives, but that doesn’t mean that we will act as inconsiderate fools in our liberty. For example, in Paul’s times the Gentile most certainly had the liberty to eat ham. Yet if he

were inviting over family friends that were Jewish, might it be wise to avoid serving ham that night? He might respect the fact that although this visiting family very well knew the New Testament laws of right and wrong, they still might have a body that would have a difficult time stomaching meat from a pig? This restraint in Christian liberty could be a loving way to avoid offense.

Another example from Paul's time was circumcision. Paul circumcised Timothy when he was going to serve as a pastor and missionary. He did not circumcise Titus. Why? Was this hypocrisy? Timothy was the son of a Jewess, whose Gentile father had not had him circumcised. He was going to serve Jewish people that Paul felt would not even give Timothy an audience if they found out he was uncircumcised. So Paul took that roadblock out of the equation. He had him circumcised for the good of his ministry. Titus had two Greek parents, so it would not have been cultural for him to be circumcised in the first place. With the Gentile audience he would be ministering to, Paul chose to take that roadblock out of the equation. Christian liberty must be used with wisdom.

In the same way, Christians today do not want to be wimpy disciples or inconsiderate fools. This is a difficult middle road to walk down when there are weak and strong believers around you.

3. Think also about the potential issues that can arise:
 - In older times, sensitive issues that could come up were things like dancing, card playing, or even cremation. Such things caused much discussion and friction.
 - In our day and age, other issues can create divisiveness, such as clothing and style. (Can a

Christian wear skinny jeans? To church?)

- Recreation – How much should a family spend on this? Could a person go to a casino in clear conscience?
- Diet – Is vegetarian the way to go? Or vegan?
- Tattoos
- How much debt to incur

All issues that can cause disagreement in our Christian liberty.

The most sensitive area of adiaphora is probably the area of worship. God does not give us any New Testament laws for how we must worship him, except for the fact that Christ and the gospel remain central. This Christian liberty has the potential to create division. We are not told that we must worship with an organ or with guitars. We are not told whether we are supposed to kneel for communion or not. We are not told that we are to use a specific liturgy or order of worship. Pastors are not told what they must wear. Yet wise use of these for our corporate worship and edification are important. And traditions can be nice that have true spiritual meaning. The challenge can be that as a congregation grows larger, holding everyone together in Christian love becomes more challenging.

4. A fourth and final reason that these issues of adiaphora are important are to avoid the negative reactions we might be tempted toward. Let's face it, in a "me-focused" generation we are tempted to look only at our own perspective. And church interaction can get downright ugly if Satan has his way. He would like nothing more than divisiveness, flip comments about others, avoidance instead of fellowship, and perhaps some even leaving a congregation.

Therefore, may we learn these lessons about FREEDOM well today. This is a simple concept that can become very complex in practice. **Yet the Lord makes it clear:**

- 1. Matters of adiaphora do not matter**
- 2. Yet they are important as we decide how best to use our Christian FREEDOM**

May we always use our FREEDOM in love for Christ. And may we strive to do all to his glory as we live in the FREEDOM he has won us!
Amen.