

Week of July 1-7

## **GRAY AREAS**

**Scripture Reading:** Read Romans chapter 14

A Trekkie is defined as an avid fan of Star Trek science fiction, television shows, and films. Most Trekkies know the various episodes by heart and only need a word or two to tell you which episode the dialogue came from. So, for all you Trekkies reading today's devotions, I have one word for you "Bynars." For you non-Trekkies, the Bynars were curious aliens who had become so interconnected with their computer technology that their language and thought patterns reflected the binary code of computers. That's why when Captain Picard wanted to know why the Bynars stole his ship instead of asking for help, they replied, "You might have said no." In other words, life for the Bynars was viewed through the lens of all-or-nothing, zeros and ones, and on/off.

For sci-fi, the idea of binary thinking makes for an interesting episode. In real life, however, all-or-nothing thinking can prove hazardous to church life. Such folks often turn into legalists who only see two options: their way or the highway. You are either with them or against them. Such an attitude, though, goes contrary to what Paul shares in today's chapter reading.

Paul opens this chapter by commanding believers to *"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters."* Did you catch that last phrase? "Disputable matters." There are areas of the Christian faith that are open to individual preferences and conscience. In other words, not everything is black and white, either/or, or ...binary. There are gray areas!

Now, before you panic, it must be stressed that Paul is not here discussing the deity of Jesus Christ, the inspiration of Scripture, the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross, salvation by faith, the resurrection of Jesus or his second coming. Those core issues are not disputable or debatable. Instead, Paul is speaking of areas of preference that do not affect the core faith of Christianity. A few of these are discussed by Paul in Romans 14. We could add a few more from our day: type of worship music; style of Sunday service, form of church government; mode of baptism, etc. In each case, multiple expressions are acceptable to God as long as they are done in His name and for His glory.

Unfortunately, gray areas can make some believers uncomfortable. They would rather draw up sides, establish rigid litmus tests, and attack those with whom they disagree. Romans 14, however, does not allow us such an approach. We are to extend grace and give room for life in the gray instead of living as spiritual "Bynars." Or, as Paul puts it, rather than passing judgment on one another or putting a stumbling block in a believer's way, we are to *"make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."* It really is the only way to "Live Long and Prosper" as the body of Christ!

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** Do a quick check of your "computer" program to see if you are operating as a spiritual "Bynar." In other words, do you avoid gray areas in favor of the all-or-nothing way? Based on what you find, ask the Lord to teach you how to extend grace in the gray while remaining faithful where Scripture is clear.

**Take-a-way:** *Don't be a spiritual "Bynar." Instead, "Live Long and Prosper" by accepting and loving other believers in the gray areas.*