

Text: [Romans 14:1-13 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: October 19, 2025

Title: “Navigating No (In Community)” > *The Sacred No* week 2

Theme: Navigating “no” in community is about respecting the other, without having to convince them to change.

1

Family vacations can be one of those things that really test your
love for your people

Our family vacations are pretty simple – we’re at the beach, so
the options for what to do are not super wide

We don’t run into challenges too often

But in my years as a pastor, I’ve certainly heard stories
Someplace like Disney where there’s a lot more to do and a lot
more choices to be made raises the level of difficulty
considerably

Parents want to do something that engages the youngest kids
But grandma can’t walk that far, and no one wants to leave her
behind

Someone wants Mexican food for dinner, someone else is about
Italian

One sibling wants to schedule every moment, and the other likes
plans to be kind of loose

And maybe there’s someone who insists that the family vacation
means everyone has to agree and go do the thing together –
whatever it is

Because that’s why you’re here – to be together!

So you go do the thing

And the teens are on their phones
Or the younger ones are bored
Or grandpa is complaining that it's too loud
And, the family time together is ruined

2

Now, scale up from a family
To a church
To a community
To a state or a nation

You see where I'm going with this
What deserves our time and attention
How we expend our limited resources
These are questions we have to navigate in community

Because even though we desire communities where everyone
agrees and everyone gets along
The reality never quite looks like that
Wherever two people are gathered, there are at least three
opinions
And through the years, I've seen people leave churches over
some very small things

That seems to be the way
We leave rather than talking things through
Which tells me we need to strengthen the muscles we have for
disagreement
And learn how to disagree well
Because we really have no choice BUT to disagree
Hence today's message

This whole series is, on some level, about boundaries
What we say "yes" to and what we say "no" to

Last week we said our “no” is sacred for a few reasons
First, because it’s a reminder that we can’t be all things to all
people – only God can
Second, because once it’s spoken, it deserves respect
And finally, because our ability to stand by our “yes”es and “no”s
define us as people of integrity

3

Paul has offered us a path for navigating disagreement in church
And it’s coming from a place where there was significant division
over things that mattered
In our last series – “Both/And” – we talked multiple times about
the kinds of arguments that rocked the early church
Specifically about circumcision and the broader question of
whether the Law of Moses would be binding on Christians

There was another issue that people had a lot of feelings about
And that was food
Because in those times, much of the meat sold in the marketplace
Had been slaughtered in sacrifice to pagan (Roman) gods
It’s just what people did

Now, I don’t know if you knew this about the steak you were
eating, whether it would be a problem for you
But for a lot of Christians it was
And it was a hard thing to avoid – there were no labels on
anything

Some said, “those gods aren’t real anyway, we know that, so
what does it matter?”
Others felt like it dishonored God
So for some, the solution was to say, “well, that’s it, I won’t eat
meat”
Which is a fine choice

It's clear from the amount of space dedicated to this issue in the New Testament that both sides were pretty dug in on the issue

And that some saw it as a bright line in what it meant to live faithfully – like salvation was at stake

Paul, I don't think, it particularly helpful in the way he frames it – he talks about those who are “weak” in faith as needing to avoid meat

And those who are “strong” in faith as feeling the freedom to eat whatever

So, I don't love his framing

But he does lay down some principles:

First, he expresses another idea we usually associate with Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:1)

“Judge not”

He says it very explicitly three times in 13 verses (v.4, 10, 13)

And implies it another four (v.1, 3, 5, 12)

Judge not because that's not your role

“Who are you to judge someone else's servants?”

Your role is to judge for yourself, to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your own conscience and then to act accordingly

Let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no”

Knowing that there will come a day when you'll give an account of yourself to God

So judge not

Pray until you get clarity about your own convictions

And then live out of them

Regardless of what others are gonna do

But then he goes one step further:
Don't allow what you believe to become a stumbling block for
someone else
If we keep reading, he says it explicitly:
"If your brother or sister is upset by your food, you are no longer
walking in love" – that's verse 15, just beyond what we read

So, if you show up at a vegetarian house, eat what they put in
front of you and don't fuss or complain about it –
that's the implication
He's telling people – don't accept someone's dinner invitation and
then start something by saying,
"Well, I can tell from this kale salad that you're weak in faith –
let's talk about that"

Because that's how some people are, right?
They just feel it necessary to engage with the goal of "correcting"
people

Have you ever noticed how many social media posts mine
engagement simply by making a small factual error
You know they know better – but more people commenting
means more eyeballs means more dollars – so why not?

People LOVE to tell you you're wrong
Why your "no" is wrong and why their "yes" is right
Or vice versa

So judge not
Discern where you stand
And don't let your beliefs become a stumbling block for someone
else

Those are the principles we find in Romans
Even if Paul was just ok at practicing them with his “weak” and
“strong” language – they’re still worth studying
So let’s talk about how we apply them

Before we go further, though
I know you may be thinking: this is fine when it’s a disagreement
about what to do on vacation
It’s different when more is at stake

The challenge in our current political crisis, for example
Why the government is shut down
And millions of people turned out to protests and counter-protests
yesterday
Is that we all feel like a lot more is at stake

Notice that Paul’s plan doesn’t require anyone to compromise
It just requires that you respect where the other is at
“Well,” you might say, “some positions, some opinions, some
convictions are not worthy of respect”
I agree, that’s true, some POSITIONS are not
But the PEOPLE who hold them are – key distinction

We can’t have it both ways
Where we want to make an argument about the sacred worth and
dignity of all people
While denigrating the sacred worth and dignity of our opponents
That’s why one of the marks of genuinely mature faith is to be
able to pray for one’s enemies –
again as it says in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:44)
It’s a tool God’s given us to re-humanize those whose “no”s and
“yes”es we don’t or can’t understand

Now this is difficult, to be sure
But it’s absolutely necessary

Because how will anyone ever see a different side to anything
unless someone engages them?
You might decide that you're not the person to engage –
that's it's not safe, that it's not worth the possible risk to you your
own well-being, to your own heart
And that's OK
It's OK to disengage
It's NOT OK to hate

5

I want to conclude by encouraging you to embrace this mantra:
“Let them do their thing, I don't have to correct them”

I remember a long time ago, in my chaplaincy training
A wise teacher was listening to me recount a pastoral care
conversation,
and she noticed that I kind of got into a back-and-forth with the
patient where I became kind of argumentative
All she said was this: “Joe, get your will out of it”

What she meant was this: why are you engaging this person as
though their choices matter so much to you?
It's not your life
They want what they want
And they like what they like
If they're not hurting anybody, what's it to you?

That, more than anything else, is what Paul is saying
“Get your will out of it”
“Don't judge the servants of another”

This week, you are going to be tempted to jump into the
comments on Facebook – I know I am all the time
Don't.

I don't think the framework can be applied where there's no relationship

Because Paul's guidance:

- 1) Don't judge,
- 2) know where you stand,
- 3) don't let your words / actions become a stumbling block -

that framework is for the community
where some say "no" to this, and others say "no" to that

So, in places where you have real relationships – in your family,
at work, at church, in the community

First, decide whether the issue rises to the level that it needs to
be engaged – judge not, right?

And if the relationship matters to you, don't allow your beliefs to
become a provocation –

that's where the "stumbling block" idea comes in

Remember, Paul sets that bar pretty high

But if you need to exercise those muscles of disagreement – and
you might

Be clear about where you stand – what your "yes" and "no" is

And why

And then engage the dialogue

Doing your level best not to judge

No one's ever been convinced by someone who looked down on
them. Period.

I know it's not an easy thing to do

But we're not going to get out of any of the disagreements we find
ourselves in unless we find ways to engage one another with
respect rather than judgment

<close in prayer>

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ