

Romans 14 : 1 – Black or White 1 -02 June 2013

Well, we are in a new series called 'Black or White'. The reality is all of us have different tastes and different preferences, isn't it? Some of us, we prefer the black 'Chai Tao Kway' (Hokkien dialect words meaning carrot cake) because the black 'Chai Tao Kway' has those extra 'oomphs' sweet dark sauce and drizzle over the savoury 'Chai Tao Kway' just makes it a divine blend of flavours. Some of us, however prefer the simpler, but also just as nice - white 'Chai Tao Kway' because there is that crunchy 'Chai Por' (Hokkien dialect words meaning preserved pickles) that when you bite on it, it explodes with beautiful aroma in your mouth. So both parties or both groups of people would like black or white 'Chai Tao Kway' accordingly and there is nothing wrong with liking black 'Chai Tao Kway' and there's nothing wrong with liking the white 'Chai Tao Kway'.

Umm... the Bible never say, "Thou shall eat black 'Chai Tao Kway' only." It is not explicitly or specifically spoken of in the Bible. How many of you, by the...by the way, like the black 'Chai Tao Kway' more? Can I see by a show of hands? Black 'Chai Tao Kway'? Not a lot. How many of you like the white 'Chai Tao Kway' more? Wah, more! This is amazing! Well, I...I preferred the black one although I don't mind the white one. Er... the black one is good. How many of you like black 'Chin Chow' (Hokkien dialect word meaning black jellied drink) more? Can I see by a show of hands? Black 'Chin Chow'? I have...I have it here... (Pastor pouring a glass of 'Chin Chow') (Laughter in the congregation)...for me to drink. (Pastor drinks the 'Chin Chow') And how many of you like the 'Tau Hway Jui' (Hokkien dialect words meaning beancurd drink) more? Okay, this is pretty much half, half lah. You know what's the... what's the drink that we show here? What... what do you call it? Wah, you all, all know about this. It's called Michael Jackson, alright? Er... named after the famous song called 'Black or White' and it's exactly what this is, alright? Michael Jackson, 'Black or White'. Some of us like the 'Chin Chow', the black one. Some of us like the white one, 'Tau Hway'. And some of us like it just a little bit mixed, black and white together. 0:02:50.5

Really, there is nothing wrong with liking the black drink or the white drink or the mixed drink. It does not make you more spiritual - drinking one over the other. It doesn't make you worse - drinking one over the other. Why? Because God allows us freedom, to choose in many things of life. These are matters where we can have different opinions and perspectives. Doesn't make you more spiritual, doesn't make you less spiritual. And freedom to choose can be seen in many other areas. It may... maybe the area of clothing. Some of you like to wear pink, doesn't make you more

spiritual or less spiritual. Some of you like to wear jeans, doesn't make you more spiritual, doesn't make you less spiritual. It maybe even the colour of your hair. We, as Asians, conservatively we prefer people with black hair, but if you come here with red or purple, again, it doesn't make you more spiritual or less... by the way, how many of you have purple hair? None here today. But I think there are plenty of people who coloured their hair and it's so easy for us to judge people based on the colour of the hair. But it's the same as judging people based on whether they are eating the black 'Chai Tao Kway' or the white 'Chai Tao Kway', isn't it?

So we have freedom to choose. Even in the entertainment we engage in, even in the jobs we choose, the course of study you take. You know what? God has given us a lot of freedom to choose the decisions or make the decisions of our lives. And that is perfectly good, that's perfectly right. Problem comes, when we insist our opinions and our preferences should be the universal standard for everybody. The problem comes when a person comes in and says, you cannot eat the white 'Chai Tao Kway', you must eat the black one! You MUST eat the black one! And he sets himself as the standard. And their problems, therefore, even in churches, when we come to people and say you cannot dress this way, you've got to dress my way. You've got to carry the version of the Bible that I approve. You've got to sing the kind of songs that we approve. And we have that kind of eh...know-it-better attitude, arrogant and proud, and we start to criticise people or judge people based on our standards. 0:05:20.0

What does the Bible have to say? Well, in Romans 14, we start a new series on 'Black-or-White'. Here, Paul says, "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions." (Romans 14:1, ESV) He says there's something called opinions. Opinions are where there is neither right nor wrong. It is not explicitly commanded, nor forbidden nor spelled out in the Bible and Christians can have different opinions. Different opinions to your dressing as I've mentioned; to your colour of the hair; to the music you listen to: jazz, Latin, country, pop. There are areas where we can exercise freedom of choice - opinions.

And Paul is saying, don't quarrel over opinions. You say, "Pastor, what are some opinions?" What is the example that is spoken of, here in Romans? Paul says in verse 2, "One person believes he may eat anything while the weak person eats only vegetables." (Romans 14:2, ESV) Very interesting. So this is the opinion, alright? Some people think you can only eat vegetables. Some people feel you can eat meat. You say, "What's the context here?" The context is this: during the time when Paul wrote this letter to the Romans, there were some Jews and some Gentiles, right in the church. Some are Jews, some are Gentiles. You say, "What are Gentiles?"

Gentiles are simply non-Jews. We are all Gentiles, alright? So in a church in Rome, there are some who were Jews and some who were Gentiles. Now, the Jews have always been brought up with very strict dietary laws, isn't it? The Jews have been told they can only eat certain kinds of animals and certain kinds of animals, they can't eat. And even for the animals they can eat, they've got to prepare them in a very careful way. They call it 'Kosher'. It's got to be 'Kosher', otherwise they can't touch, they can't eat. Now, when the Jews brought up with such dietary laws, come to know Jesus. He gets saved. He believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. You know what the Bible says? The Bible says all those old dietary laws need not apply anymore. Now, it's not easy for a Jew to accept that. When God said this to Peter the apostle, Peter had a hard time believing that he could now eat all kinds of animals. It's very hard. So a Jew brought up with dietary laws, ingrain in his mind, believes he can't, until God tells him he can. But even then it's hard for him to accept. 0:08:05.1

So, suppose two Jews came to Singapore. And they're believers, they are Christians and you brought them out for lunch. You brought them out to the famous 'Bak Kut Teh' (Hokkien dialect words meaning pork ribs soup). And you put the pork ribs right in front of the two Jews. The Jew... your Jewish friends asked you, "What is this har?" "This is 'Bak Kut Teh', the best in Singapore!" "Huh, what is 'Bak Kut Teh'?" "It is from the pork ribs, the best of the pork ribs." Now, the two Jews will now have a kind of a little debate. One of them will say, "'Bak Kut Teh', made from pork, I can't eat lah. I can't eat pork because I remember when I was brought... I was being brought up by my mum, my dad and by the rabbis, they tell me, cannot touch pork, it is unclean." The other friend will say, "But...we believe in Jesus already what, Jesus set us free from the dietary laws. Can eat." "No, no, no, I cannot eat." "No, you can eat!" "No, no, no, I can't eat." You know what? They have two different opinions. Eating the pork ribs, if one of them were to eat, eating the pork ribs, doesn't make him more spiritual, and not eating the pork ribs, also doesn't make the other any more spiritual. You can eat, you can also don't eat. It's fine. But the issue is, don't quarrel over the opinions.

Now, this is not only to the Jews, the Gentiles also have the same problem about eating. You see, the Gentiles before they came to know Jesus, they are idol worshippers. They worship idols. And when you worship idols, there are times when you present sacrifices to the idols. So they have those religious feasts, people will bring in all kinds of animals, meat, they sacrifice to the idols and after that they will feast on it. Whatever is left over, can't finish eating, they will bring it to the marketplace, to...to sell. So people are familiar, when you go to the marketplace, sometimes, when you buy the meat, it can be meat that has already been used to

worship idols. So, when a Gentile gets saved, he believes in Jesus Christ, he gets very upset. He is very scared. He's very scared of buying meat from the market because just in case, the meat has been used to worship idols.

So these two Gentiles, suppose two Gentiles, they talk with each other. One of them will say, "Hiyah... it's so difficult. All the meat in the market, in Tiong Bahru seems to be used for worship... worshipping of idols. I don't think I can eat in peace. So now I want to eat vegetables." 'Jiak chai' (Hokkien dialect words meaning eat vegetable), I don't want to eat 'bak' (Hokkien dialect word meaning meat) already, cannot because it may be used to worship idols. The other Gentiles says, "What's wrong? What's wrong even if it has been used to worship idols? I mean, we know that idols are no gods anyway, so it doesn't matter." So the two Gentiles will also quarrel. "I cannot eat the meat!" "I want to eat the meat!" And again, they have different opinions. Eating the meat doesn't make you more spiritual. Not eating the meat also doesn't make you more spiritual. Drinking the 'Tau Hway' or the 'Chin Chow' doesn't make one better or less spiritual in any way. 0:11:27.0

So that is the problem then. They began to quarrel. Now, add to that, there were also people who esteem one day as better than another. So, as you know, the Jews have many feasts and special days, many celebrations. After they came to know Christ, actually all those feasts and religious observances of the special days are no more set aside because it's all fulfilled in Jesus Christ. But there will be some who say we must, and there will be some who say we don't need to. So, can you imagine in a church in Rome that day? How messy it can be? Some believe can eat meat. Some Jews believe they get eat all kinds of animals. Some Jews believe they can't. Some Gentiles believe they can eat all kinds of food sold, some Gentiles believe they can't. Some Jews believe we still must observe the festivals, some Jews would believe they can't, they don't need to. So there's a whole different diversity in the church. And Paul now says, "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions." (Romans 14:1, ESV) 0:12:34.0

There are different people. There are some people who we'll call weak in faith. What do you mean by weak in faith? They don't believe, even after believing in Jesus Christ - I can eat pork. These are people who are not so sure, not so confident, not so convicted that we can receive all things with thanksgiving and prayer. There's nothing wrong with them. It's just in this part, they can't believe it as much. Then there are Gentiles, who are weak in their faith because they feel that food that has been offered to idols is now unclean and I cannot touch it. Paul says, there will be people like that and some of you who are strong in faith, don't despise them, don't

look down on them but instead welcome them, receive them and not quarrel over opinions. You get the picture?

Now let me just say, just in case we walked away thinking: the Bible is full of areas for us to have opinions about. I want to tell you that there are many things in the Bible that are not subjected to our opinions. They are clear, explicit, specific teachings and it is not left to our own interpretation. So, I'll say this, in a Christian faith, in the body of truth, there is what we call the essentials. You say "What's the essentials?" The Gospel - Jesus is God, is not left to your opinion, alright? Jesus died and rose again for our sins. It is clear, it is not left to our opinions, alright? Jesus saves us from our sins and only Jesus saves. That's the essential, okay? So there are many essentials. It maybe the law, it maybe the Gospel, it may be the teachings about God, it is not left up to us to decide yes or no. Essentials. Essentials. But besides essentials, there's a whole circle, there's a whole body of truth that we will call the non-essentials. As I've mentioned, what you eat, what you drink, what you wear, what school you go to, which line of work you should pursue, what are kinds of purchases you should have, what kind of music should you plug into. These are what we will call the non-essentials, because the Bible didn't specifically say, you must listen only to country music. The Bible never specifically says you can only wear shirts that are black or white. No, there is a lot of freedom. This is what we call the non-essentials. 0:15:06.3

And the key is for us to be very, very firm in our essentials, very firm! You don't budge. You're willing to fight for what is true and you may be, even willing to die for what is true. But when it comes to the non-essentials, you can be flexible. Can be flexible. Don't be over opinionated in the non-essentials. Now, let me give you an example of someone who gets out of balance. There are people today who don't believe that there are some...there are something called essentials and non-essentials. To them, everything is essential. So it will look like this (graphic shown). Everything must fit my interpretation. Everything! From the way you dress in church. You got to be dressed according to my tastes. If you are not dressed according to my taste, you are not a good Christian. Your colour of the hair must be according to my taste. If it's not according to my taste, you are not a good Christian. So there are people who insist and their scope of thinking is, all essential, no non-essential. And this is what will develop to be extreme fundamentalism.

By the way, this is very appropriate and pertinent to GLCC. We certainly had practices and teachings that may tend towards extreme fundamentalism. I will explain more, I'll give you examples later on. Such as the length of skirt, umm... the kind of and the...and the issue of pants, pants for ladies. The Bible version we choose,

the song book we can sing from. It's only my way or else it's the highway. You see, there is that realm that there is no non-essential negotiable. But we need to realize that there are essentials and non-essentials. On the other hand, there is a danger when you don't believe that there are essentials. Everything is subjective. Everything is up to your opinions. Then it will look something like this (graphic shown). Everything is non-essential. What will it tend towards? You tend towards liberalism. There's no objective truth, everything is up to our interpretation. 0:17:29.1

So these are the two extremes. Churches today, Christians today, can swing to extreme fundamentalism where it's all about how I set the standard. Or they can go to the other way where it says there's no standard, doesn't matter. But the Bible balances its essentials and non-essentials and he says here... today, we are focusing on the non-essentials, alright? We are focusing on this realm, the non-essentials where it says don't quarrel over opinions. Don't quarrel over what I have not said, whether it's right or wrong. Don't quarrel over things that I have not specifically, explicitly commanded nor forbidden. Don't quarrel over whether you should eat black 'Chai Tao Kway' or white 'Chai Tao Kway'. Don't quarrel over these things.

Now, I'm going to show you now, some examples of non-essentials. Maybe before I show you, can you tell me some examples? Of non-essentials? So that I know whether you get the concept of essential and non-essential, any suggestion? Hair style, alright. Some of you are very upset with my hair style, ha...ha...(laughter in the congregation) Yup, don't quarrel over the hair style alright? Opinion on hair style. Hair style is a...is a non-essential right? The Bible doesn't tell all of us to comb our hair in a particular way or cut it or colour it in a particular way, that's a non-essential. Hair style.

What else? Beat box. You see this thing? Wah, I tell you, (Pastor hit the beat box) there are people who will leave church because of that. It is, and... and...and the reason is because maybe the way we've look at an instrument or musical style has become an essential that we cannot be flexible about. So musical instrument is one.

Bible version, alright. Bible version is one. Some will believe only this version can be used. Everything else should be thrown away. Does the Bible ever say that? Well, it is not specifically, explicitly commanded. Now, let me clarify: non-essentials doesn't mean you can choose any way you want, with no regard for any principles. No! Principles will be involved, I will demonstrate that in a while. But choosing a black 'Chai Tao Kway' in and of itself is not sinful. Choosing a white 'Chai Tao Kway' in and

of itself is not more spiritual. Other principles need to come in, but the matter of itself is not wrong.

Coloring my hair green. If I do that next Sunday, doesn't mean your pastor has become carnal. Now, you may say, "Pastor, that is not very appropriate because of principle 1, 2, 3." That's fine. That's fine, I understand that. But the act of colouring it green doesn't make it bad or worse, it doesn't. The Bible doesn't say so. Alright? You get the picture? It also doesn't mean that non-essentials are not important. No, they are important. They are important! They are still important and you need to study the Bible to know how to make those right...right decisions. But what I'm saying here is, the essentials are what you have to be very, very firm in and the non-essentials are where you can be flexible about. There can be different opinions. Some would like to eat meat, some would like to say I want to stay a vegetarian. That's fine! Both ways are fine, and maybe the 'Michael Jackson's' are also fine. The in-betweens are fine.
0:21:07.7

Okay, any other examples? Bible version, musical instrument, music style, hairstyle, dressing. Orr... cremation or burial, yes, actually it is also an area where I think it's non-essential. Yup, that's right. There are some who insist it must be cremation, there are some who insist it must be burial. Actually, the Bible never insists in that way, isn't it? What else? Ahh...drinking alcohol. Mmm...yes, Amen, true. It is a non-essential but there are principles involved and we will demonstrate that in a...maybe next week, or next time.

Any other examples? I believe this church has strong fundamentalistic backgrounds, and even for some of you who have joined us, er... midway, we have these sorts of thinking and I know this message, this sermon might generate more questions than answers. Okay, and some of you may say "Pastor, you 'jia lak' (Hokkien dialect words meaning in deep trouble) ah you, I'm not going to listen to you anymore." That's fine. What I'm trying to do here, is just to share with you the Bible principles and you can differ in the way you interpret. I totally respect that. Just don't differ with me on the essentials, alright? Essentials is where we must agree. Non-essentials, I think there must be a generosity to agree to disagree at times. We must understand it is not always wrong, it's just different.

Now, let me just give you some of the examples I thought of, in the non-essential realm. And this is these (list shown): tattoos, dressing, Bible version, musical instruments, music style, movies and...do you know that there are times, where in our church, where we say no TVs, no movies? Now what is that? Is it an absolute

essential or not? So we look at these: alcohol intakes, smoking, plastic surgery...wah, very exciting - plastic surgery; buying stocks - is it all right for Christians to be involved in stocks? ; branded goods. I say this also: end times events - the exact sequence, the exact view - whether it is 'amill' or 'premill', for those who understand. Baptism mode - immersion or sprinkling; divorce and remarriage; issues on special days – Christmas, Halloween. What does the Bible have to say about these things? Well, let me say, I believe in all these subjects, they belong to the realm of non-essentials. I believe I can differ with you in my interpretation on these events and we can still be brothers and sisters in Christ. And we need not quarrel over them. Now, we may not agree but it's okay, we can agree to disagree. We can discuss, that's fine but we should not divide nor split nor argue. That's what happens in churches, folks. We take an issue and it becomes the ultimate issue and the church splits right down the middle because of something that you have placed as essential, when it really is not. 0:24:22.6

So Paul says, this is so fundamental to the health of the church. Don't quarrel over the non-essentials, don't quarrel over opinions. By the way, I think most quarrels are in this realm of non-essentials. Very paradoxical. You would think, that the most likely thing to spit the church would be essentials. No, the reality: this is where most churches will split over - the non-essentials.

So, let me just demonstrate or illustrate to you, the specifics here. Let's start with tattoos. I start with tattoos because it may be the least offensive to you, but it is also very interesting to start with tattoos. Now, how many of you feel, tattoos are forbidden in the Bible? Can I see by a show of hands? Huh? 4, 5, 6, 7, 8? 8 people out of this whole congregation believe tattoos are forbidden. Let me show you a verse, alright? Let me show you a verse. Leviticus 19:28, "You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD." Wow, the reason here is, you shouldn't tattoo yourself and the reason is because I am the Lord. How many of you have tattoos? Now all the hands go down right? Now, let me show... let me tell you, you may take this verse and say, I believe no tattoos are to be allowed. On the other hand, you will be really hard pressed to explain this. In the context of Leviticus 19:26 to 31. It says here: "You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes. You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. (Don't shave, don't cut your hair.) You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves. I am the LORD." Do not profane your daughter and so on and so forth... do not turn to medium, necromancers, do not seek them out and so on and so forth.

What is the context here? The context that God is saying in Leviticus is, writing to the Israelites to say: don't follow the pagans! Don't follow those who worship idols! These are the things they do to worship idols. So they tattoo themselves, 'ang kong kia' (Hokkien dialect words meaning pictures drawn) and everything, they draw a lot of things. They pierce themselves through. Don't be like them! So the context here is not really against tattooing in and of itself, because if it is, you better come with a full beard of hair and er... because it's the same breath, isn't it? It's spoken of in the same breath. You want to be consistent, don't just target tattoos. And all of you ladies, please go and patch up your ears. You have pierced yourself, cut your body already. How many of you have ear rings? I mean, what do you call that? Ear-hole ah? Huh? Ear-piercing...ear-hole...haha (laughing)... okay, how many of you have ear-piercings? I tell you, you guys have committed abomination you know! If you take this verse as it is! 0:27:49.0

Now, the point I'm trying to make is this: you may take this verse and say no piercings, no tattoos. That's fine, if you want to. But please don't go around in GLCC or in other churches, as a spiritual policeman, looking at their ears. You go and patch it up. You go and patch it up. And watch their tattoos... now principles are involved when it comes to tattoo. You tattoo satanic things or... or obscene or profane things, that's totally out because other principles are dragged in. But tattoos in and of itself, may not be a sinful thing. It's not one of what we will call the essentials. You don't see it repeated in the New Testament. It is not a clear, explicit command of the Bible, so this is how I feel we can look at a subject called tattoos and agreed to disagree. If someone walks in to church, and he's full of tattoos...full! What would you say? Get out of church! You are an abomination! Or if you want to stay in this church, go and laser it away! Would you say that? It's not an essential. It's not! And we got to be careful of the extreme fundamentalistic attitudes, judgemental spirit we can have toward others. Alright, so I think this is example number one.

Example number two is dressing. Now this may be a picture that says (picture shown), er...when you come to church, no miniskirt, er...no whatever...no singlet, no slippers dress code. Is this real? Very real, isn't it? Umm...last year, there was this newspaper article, I'm not sure whether you remember. There was this article about a lady, who was forbidden from entering the Catholic Church because of a dress code. This is the newspaper article. It's in Straits Times, February last year where it says, one Catholic Church says, "Dressing like this is not okay." This is what they called 'samfu'. 'Samfu' is not 'cheongsam' ah. 'Samfu' is where the... the pants are a little bit below the knee. It's Chinese kind of a dressing. But the church says this is not okay and... in My Paper, they also report on the same things. They say that in their church,

Saint Anthony's church, they have a dress code that allows women to wear skirts or dresses that ends 2.5 to 5cm above the knees. So...so you got to measure lah. When you come to church and your skirt...actually when you see the pastor, you better kneel a bit lah and then it will be lower (laughter in the congregation), but then after that you can come up. Okay, their dress code has a limitation of 2.5 to 5 cm. Now, I'm not criticising any church for having dress codes. I'm not. I think in a school you need to have some decorum, in the office you have...need some decorum and actually there's nothing wrong with a church saying, we believe this is what you should have, you should have some dress code. I'm not against it. I'm just saying that different people will have different applications for dress code. Some churches would believe it's 2.5. Some churches believe it's 5.5. Some believe it's 30 cm, I don't know, I do not know. Different, because the Bible never say you cannot wear anything more than 2.5 cm above your knee. It doesn't say that. So you can differ in your opinions.

Now, this is what Saint Anthony's church's statement has to go, "Clothing promoting vices like drugs, alcohol, violence, clothing made of spandex and translucent materials, clothing exposing entire shoulder, chest, back or thighs, er...sportswear and flip-flops are forbidden." So that is the way they have applied it for the church and that's fine, we understand. Life BP church. This is from the newspapers, not because some of you are from Life in the past ah. Life BP church says, "We do not enforce a dress code." That's how they apply this. We don't enforce a dress code. "But they are encouraged to be presentable and not dress in a way that may pose any temptation or distraction to others. People come here for the purpose of worship." So this is the way they have applied it. Very fair, very reasonable. A member of Kampong Kapor Methodist Church, all these are taken from the newspapers article, alright? It says, "I don't think a dress code is necessary if people dressed appropriately. I suppose if people are not dressing appropriately, then they would impose a dress code." Again this is saying, it's alright, generally we trust people to be decent. Umm... and if they don't, then we may have to enforce some rules and regulations. 0:32:45.2

What does the Bible say? 3 cm? 5 cm? Expose shoulders? Expose thighs? Spandex? Not spandex? They don't even have spandex in those days. What does the Bible say? The Bible simply says this, alright? "Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire..." (1 Timothy 2:9, ESV) What is the principle given? Modesty. In GLCC, I've had members come up to me and say, "Pastor, you need to preach about how our girls are wearing skirts above their knees." I told them, I think the issue is not about the rule is there. Because we may set a rule in church,

they can come to church, wear those long skirts, sweep the floor type (laughter in the congregation). But after service is over, they can go to the toilet and change. And purposely change to the very high type. You say, what can I do? I mean, am I going to be their policeman for the rest of their life? I go shopping centre, eh... catch...catch, catch, catch, catch and take photo and show on the screen here? No, I'm not going to do that. Because I'm not about to change your behaviour, if the heart is not changed. You see, we...I...don't believe we should be a church that sets this kind of rules, so that people may feel guilty about it. But rather I think, our women, our girls, our ladies should understand the principle of modesty. God didn't tell me the centimetres, therefore I'm not going to impose centimetres on you. Translucency, you mean what's the degree? How much light can shine through? I don't know! (Laughter in the congregation) I can't and all I can say is: please, dress yourself modestly, respectably with self-control. Don't expose yourself to be temptations to others. Don't flirt around, even with the dress code.

By the way, how many of you today wear gold or pearls? Can I see? Raise ah, don't be scared lah! I'm not going to kill you lah! I'm just going to ex-communicate you, that's all. (Laughter in the congregation) Eh... the Bible says, not with gold or pearls you know, and you still wear it in church?! Let me...let me just explain, just in case you feel really guilty, looking at this verse. Umm...I don't think this is about you not wearing apparel or jewellery or adornments, er... because that would mean, you don't braid your hair. That will mean that you can't wear attire that maybe cost a certain amount of money. What is costly? It is subjective. The principle here is, don't be...don't be ostentatious. Wah, like a Christmas tree like that (laughter in the congregation). You swing the pearls, dedededede... don't go around like a...wah...I mean that's the idea alright? It's not against the thing itself but it's against the whole image you're trying to portray. And so, this is about dressing. 0:36:02.2

I'm not here therefore and in the church to enforce any particular rules. But again, I hope Gospeliters, all of us as followers of Jesus Christ, our testimony is seen in the way we dress, particularly ladies. You say it's not my problem what, I like to dress this way. No, no, no, no, it's about your brothers in Christ, who maybe stumbled by you. You say that's his problem. But it's your problem because we are part of the body and when you stumble someone, it's a grievous sin, in God's eyes. So be careful and er...I've never caught any one of our ladies and pointed you out because I believe you got to hear this for yourself and you make your own decisions, alright? I respect you and I believe the Holy Spirit, He lives in you to direct you to dress accordingly. Some of you may have to go back and burn your wardrobe (laughter in the congregation). I think so. Umm...but I don't think anyone of us should play inspector

to that lah. Your parents may have a say to how you apply the principles and you need to submit to your parents. So all that is involved in dressing.

But let me touch on something else. Orr... another statement by a pastor alright? This pastor says, "Such an imposition (in other words we force people to conform to some standards we set), only increases anger, frustration, transgresses, hypocrisy, self-righteousness, guilt and pride." This is true. It's true right? When you do this to people, you just generate all these things. Why? "So we want to avoid judging one another, gossiping and nitpicking at whether the skirt should not be allowed 1 or 2 or 3 inches above the knee. Grace would make room for different levels of understanding and different contexts. A church that often receives beach tourists would be mad to ban flip-flops. In Myanmar, the pastors wear flip-flops." It's true. Have you been to third world countries, on mission trips and you see the pastor dressed in suit and tie? Everybody else is wearing their normal working clothes, as in the farming clothes you know, soil all over. But the pastor wears suit and tie. You say, "siao' (Hokkien dialect word meaning crazy) ah! So hot and you got to pay a lot of money to... but, but, but I saw the missionaries wear like this. You see, you failed to understand this is a non-essential. Being a good pastor doesn't mean you've got to dress like that. Frankly, I have seen a well-known US pastor, who leads thousands of people in his church. He preaches with flip-flops. Flip-flops mean sandals, slippers. I think to me is... wow if I wear slipper to church next Sunday, you will flip at me right? But he wears slippers to preach. By the way, Jesus worn slippers lah, whenever he preach lah. So why are we hung up over something called dressing? Again, principles involved alright? Our testimony, modesty, our...maybe even the way I show reverence may be seen in the way I dress, but let's not be legalistic or extreme fundamentalist when it comes to such matters. 0:39:12.7

Let me ask you another very interesting thing about dressing. Er... this question: can women wear pants to church? When I came to GLCC, er...how long ago was that? That's about 19 years ago. 18, 19 years ago. If I'm not wrong, because I'm not a lady, I don't care, but if I'm not wrong, we had a belief that women should not wear pants. How many of you came from churches that believe that? Can I see by a show of hands? Okay, quite a few of you, alright. So women cannot wear pants. Let me ask you now. How many of you are wearing pants? I mean not the guys! (Laughter in the congregation) If you're not wearing pants, something is wrong. How many of you ladies are wearing pants, can I see? You know what? You're in trouble man! If I transported you back 19, 20 years ago, you'd be in trouble. Why? Because we believe women should not wear pants. Why are you wearing pants ah? Can I ask? What...what makes you think you can wear pants? Anything? Anyone? Easier to

serve. But it's sinful lah (laughter in the congregation). You are being a cross-dresser. You wear things that belong to man. That's the argument, right? That's why women cannot wear pants. That's why, even when they go Sunday School and teach kids and they squat down, they wear a skirt. I don't know how you squat lah (laughter in the congregation). But you got to wrap yourself like... very, very 'kang kho' (Hokkien dialect words meaning difficult) lah. Up and down, wah, it's so difficult, but cannot, I cannot wear pants because church says so. So, actually a lot of you are quiet rebels. Somehow in your heart, you know it was a "No" to pants but you don't care now. You just wear it. And the reason why I don't clamp down or I don't bark on you or anything like that, is because I believe this is something that is of non-essential nature. It's in the area of opinions. 0:41:09.9

Let me bring you to why there are some opinions, because of this verse: Deuteronomy 22. It says here, "A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God." (Deuteronomy 22:5, ESV) This is strong, man. This is really strong, right? So if you believe that wearing pants is wearing a man's garment, then you are an abomination to the Lord. Umm...however, I believe it's over simpli...it's an over simplistic view of this verse. Because why? In those days, where got pants? They wear robes you know? Jesus worn skirt leh. Right? I mean... wah, anyway who said pants are for men anyway? Who said it? If you go to India, all the ladies wear pants! Are they abomination to the Lord? To say pants equal to cross-dressing is just to me, too...too far a-stretch. In fact, I was told in China, every...in a village, every lady wear pants. You wear anything else is inappropriate, you expose yourself more than what they are comfortable with. So suppose a Christian from a village in China comes to Singapore, what will she do? She's in...she's in trouble because in China she's supposed to wear pants, come to GLCC in the past cannot wear pants. So, don't come to church lah. So these are the things that make it really hard for us to make this like a rule, that you can't wear pants. Alright, so I know this is controversial, maybe some of you will be upset with me, but I just want to tell you, please don't kill me over this. It's not for us to divide over. Let's not quarrel over opinions. I just want to share with you how the Scripture can shape the way we think and not take things superficially and callously. Orr... I've been told this, therefore it is like that. 0:43:22.3

And next example is - Bible versions. Very unfortunate, that even right here in Singapore, we've churches that split because they choose to believe that a particular version is the only allowed version for Christians. Some of you may not be aware, but there are people who believe that maybe the King James version is the only version any Christian can use. In fact, they say, this is the inspired version - meaning it came

directly from God. Everything else is secondary. It's useless. It's corrupt. And churches split. I think it's really unfortunate because the Bible never says that! The Bible never say in 1611, I will commission King James to give you the only allowed English version. Now when you choose a Bible, principles are involved, sure! But at the end of the day, you can only say, "This is in my opinion the best version." But you cannot say, "This is the only version. This is the divine version." You can't. You got to be balanced, you got to be fair. Over the past 6 months, 5, 6 months, I've switched the pulpit here, to use ESV. I'm not saying ESV is the inspired best super duper version. I'm just saying it is also a good version. A version that maybe for most of us here in Singapore, we can understand more easily. I think it's a faithful translation, it's word for word, but it is written in a more modern way, so the language is understandable.

In fact, when you understand how the Bible was written in the Greek and the Hebrew. It is written to common lay people. It's in a language that the average folk can understand. But when you come to King James, it is in a language that the average folk cannot understand. So in that regard, ESV may even be better. It's simpler, it's clearer, it's more direct. But then again I'm not here to argue whether this version is better or not, all of us will have our opinions and we need not divide.

I show a picture of pulpit because there have been people who come to GLCC before and left us. You know why they left us? Pastor, why is it that you preached without a pulpit? It is worth dividing over. Can you believe that? Now, I'm not amazed because some things when we don't look at it objectively, can become the ultimate thing and it divides the church. So I've people who say how come don't have pulpit because I say Jesus never preach with a pulpit lah. Did he? Never! So why is the pulpit becoming now the sacred cow? Not necessary. I've also had people tell me, "Pastor, you cannot read the Bible from your handphone. You got to read 'The Bible'!" Well, different opinions.

Musical instruments, very controversial and I doubt I will be able to solve this or explain all that to you. But the church has historically valued the piano or the organ. By the way, when it was first used in the church, it was...it was deemed a devil's instrument. Do you know that? Today we think it is the sacred instrument, but when it was used first, it was the devil's instrument in the eyes of the church, because it was used in pubs. It was used in the world, in the secular realm and people brought it to the church and they freak out over it. Now, let me say this, you might be very uncomfortable with our guys using some of the instruments and I... let me say this, you are entitled to your opinions, that's fine, really. We can't force ourselves, into fitting others opinions, but maybe I like to encourage you to look at this in an

objective way, to agree to disagree. It is not wrong, just different. I also want to assure you that when we use instruments, it's got to be used tastefully and appropriately. We're not here to jazz up the thing, we're not here to make this a rock concert, not at all! But be balanced with regards to individual instruments in and of itself. I may also extend this logic, this understanding to the styles of music. In GLCC, I believe we have a certain style and we're not out to try all these kind of styles, disco...no, no, no, no, no. But I'm not saying that disco, as a style of music is necessarily wrong or sinful. I don't think it's suitable for worship, but I don't say that it is a devil's music, sinful music or inappropriate music, for you own listening or whatever. The Bible never say, thou shall not listen to metal, or rock, or so on and so forth. I...I...get what I'm trying to say? 0:48:19.2

Be firm where Scripture is firm and be flexible where Scripture allows you flexibility to do so. Now, we can go on and on, and my time will be up, so I know I could only cover a few things, but there's so many more. Plastic surgery, some of you may be very interested to ask. Er...stocks, some of you are buying stocks, can I buy stocks? I can't answer all of them. I may try to, in the weeks to come, but there is a... we are starting something called the Pastor's...Q&A with Pastor, ask the pastor. That's on the 30th June, that's about 2-3 weeks Sunday from now. After the 2nd service, I'll sit around with those who may have questions and I thought this might be something you would want to ask or even other things. So if you have, stored it in your mind and we can look at how Scripture is applied in all these aspects of Christian living. But let me just try to come to a conclusion.

As for the one who is weak in faith, receive him, don't despise him. There's a danger for us to divide over these matters. The story is told of Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker. You heard of Spurgeon. Joseph Parker and Charles Spurgeon were two preachers as contemporaries in London. Two well-known preachers, they were friends, until they disagreed over something. Joseph Parker went to the theatre. I think it's like the movies of the time. So when Joseph Parker, as the pastor went to the theatre, Spurgeon was upset. How could you as a pastor, go to the theatre? They attribute that to worldliness, you see. And Joseph Parker then pick on Spurgeon, what...what did he pick on Spurgeon about? Spurgeon were smoking cigars. It's real, by the way. He smokes cigars. So both of them differed in opinions. Actually cigars are not forbidden in the Bible. Thou shall not smoke Marlboro. Never say that lah, okay? But there are principles involved in cigar smoking, alright? Eventually, Spurgeon was asked, why did you smoke? He says, "I'm not excessive about it." What do you mean by excessive? You don't smoke more than 2 at one time. Wah, I thought it's very interesting, this guy. Two at one time? And he finally...Spurgeon finally quit

cigars, when he saw a picture of him smoking cigar on the billboard. He realized. Another principle, cigar in and of itself is not wrong, but the testimony that is involved. Another principle has come into play and therefore he quit. But my point is, Joseph Parker and CH Spurgeon could differ in opinions and not be friends. That's what Scripture is saying, don't do! Don't argue over it! By all means, have different opinions, you can discuss, you can dialogue but don't quarrel, don't divide, don't split over opinions. 0:51:20.9

Can I leave this statement with you? We can be different, and not wrong. Most of us think that when we are different, someone is wrong. No, no, no, no. We can be different, and not wrong. Agree to disagree. And this quarrel can start both ways ah, because the Bible says in verse 3, let not the one who eats - the one who eats is the strong one, right? According to the definition here. He's strong. He believes it can be eaten. Pork can be eaten for a Jew. Food offered to idols can be eaten for a Gentile. He believes can eat. And his problem is that he will despise the one who doesn't. On the other hand, the one who doesn't eat - the weak one, can also criticise the one who eats. So it can shoot arrows and bombs both ways. The strong one can despise and say your faith is just lousy, weak. And the one who abstained, the weak one can say you are inconsiderate, unloving, unspiritual. That's where conflicts arise.

There's a wise statement said by Augustine, close to 2000 years ago. I believe it holds true still today and it is this, my last slide: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity (which is love)." I think it's a great principle. Fight for the essentials, be willing even to die for the essentials. I am! But I'm not going to fight with you over the non-essentials. I want to understand that there can be liberty, there can be freedom, for you to choose the black 'Chai Tao Kway', for me to eat the white 'Chai Tao Kway'. For you to have purple hair and for me to have black hair. For you to wear pink shirt, and for me to wear white shirt. We can have liberty, in the non-essentials but in all times, even when I disagree with you, let there be charity.

Well, this is the introductory sermon to the series on 'Black or White' and thereafter I'm going to share with you about how we can have good solid principles, to help us decide on opinions. How can I come to a settled opinion for every single subject of my life? And I also hope in the future to share with you how we can as a church, though very, very diverse, be united as one, according to Romans chapter 14. But I hope this is a message that will allow you to have a greater thirst for Scripture. Study the Bible, don't live your life just taking man's word for it. The danger is that we don't process it. We don't think about it, and we so think that pants are therefore sinful, touching alcohol is therefore sinful. Having tattoos is therefore sinful without first

looking to the Bible and understanding the intent of God. I also hope in the church like ours, we come from different backgrounds, let not the non-essentials split up the body of Christ and I pray that the unity that is so valued by Jesus, so prayed for by Jesus, will be seen in us. Though diverse, one united people, bringing glory to the beauty, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, shall we just bow for a word of prayer in this time. 0:54:58.3

I know this is not a usual sermon, in a sense, we hardly touch on subjects like this, but maybe this is a message that you would like to consider for your own life. Maybe there are areas in your life that you have been mean and harsh to others and you didn't mean to. You really didn't mean to, because you just wanted to stand up for the truth. But maybe this morning you have realized there are opinions. They are the non-essentials and maybe how others have applied the truth is not wrong or sinful, and you recall the words of Paul, let's not quarrel over opinions. I pray this would be something that you can take to heart, because I'm not here to tell you, your opinions are wrong or your opinions should not be strongly voiced. No, I think you should have your own opinions, but there's a difference between position and posture. My position can be one that is clear, but my posture must be one of grace and love. Maybe there's someone you have offended or someone whom you have been harsh to and you know you need to get right. Then I ask you to at this time pray, and ask God to give you that strength, that grace to decide what you need to do.

I also ask you at this time, to pray for the church. The body of Christ is so fragmented, even right here, that it brings no glory to God. The Gospel should change us, to major on the majors, to agree to disagree, to realize that in all things there must be charity. Would you pray for the unity of this body? That we'll stop wanting to split and split and split, divide and divide and divide. But to hear God's call to unite, to unite, to unite. That we will be that strong blazing flame, that brings glory to Jesus. You see, at the end of the day, it's not about my opinion, it's about what brings glory to God. My Saviour came for me, to save me. Let's live this life for Him. So Father, this morning we are grateful, that this word can find good soil in our hearts, we pray for the various decisions that need to be made, that you allow us to make them. And I pray for a church that is full of grace and love and generosity, a church that is finely balanced, to have that firmness in the deepest truths. The fundamentals of the faith. And yet that generosity and that flexibility to look at the non-essentials. Spare us dear God, from extreme fundamentalism. Spare us dear God, from liberalism. Allow us to be on the balanced knife edge of biblical theology. Commit ourselves to you, may the beauty of Jesus be seen in your people. We pray all this now in Jesus' name, Amen.

