

Romans 14:13-23
September 27, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

During our study of Romans 14:1-12, Paul made a strong case that God is the judge of His people, not us. According to Rom 14:4, Paul reminds us that all of us are accountable to God, so we shouldn't be in the business of judging another servant before his/her own master.

Paul then reinforces this same message in v.10-11: "Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written, "As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.""

So here's the tension that I believe most of us have been feeling over the last two weeks ever since Pastor Dave preached on the topic of child dedication belonging to same sex parents. Paul keeps telling us we shouldn't judge others and understand that each of us will be accountable for our own behavioral choices. So:

Q: How do you avoid judging others if their behaviors are unaddressed that are biblically wrong? Don't we have an obligation to safeguard the spiritual wellbeing of the church and the teaching of God's Word? [Judging someone's teachings is quite permissible:

- Deut 13 (Israelites were commanded to practice sound judgment by thoroughly testing the teachings of their leaders)
- I Thess 5:21-22 (Paul commands them to test all things and to hold fast to that which is good.)
- Acts 17:11 (Paul compliments the Bereans for testing his teachings.)
- Luke 12:48 (Biblically, authority and accountability go hand in hand)
- James 3:1 (The greater the responsibility one has, the greater the accountability.)
- Matt 7:1-5 (Speck in eye - The Lord also cautioned followers not to judge others self-righteously)
- Matt 7:15-20 (Jesus exhorts us to judge false prophets who would spread false teaching in the church that lead others astray.)]

Transition: I have been wrestling with this just like you. It appears that there is a distinct difference between judging the teaching you hear in the church versus judging the people in the church. So as we finish today's lesson, I believe Paul's message is that all Christ-followers CAN choose to not be a stumbling block to other believers exhibiting questionable behaviors BY embracing the **REASONS** he gives us in today's text. Let's find Paul's REASONS.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Romans 14:13-23]

V.13:

- Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, **make up your mind not to put any stumbling block** or obstacle in your brother's way.

V.14:

- As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.

V.15:

- If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. [In Christian love he ought to forgo his liberty in Christ to avoid being a spiritual hindrance to his spiritual **brother**.]

V.16:

- Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.

V.17:

- **For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**, [food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do” (1 Cor. 8:8, NIV)]

V.18:

- because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

V.19:

- Let us therefore **make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification**. [Help those weaker in the faith to grow, i.e. those whose faith is “less developed”]

V.20:

- Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

V.21:

- It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. [To Paul **food** and one’s personal convictions about it were not so important as the spiritual health of a fellow Christian and **the work of God**.]

V.22:

- So **whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God**. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. [Don’t force your opinions on another believer]

V.23:

- But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. [The principle is, “When in doubt, don’t.”]

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.13: What decision does Paul ask us to make? [Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way]

Q: This is the first time we hear him talking about being a “stumbling block.” What does it mean to be a “stumbling block or obstacle?” [It’s engaging in a personal practice that causes our brother to fall into sin.]

X-REF: I Cor 8 [Read whole account]

X-REF: I Cor 10:23-24 [Not everything is beneficial]

Q v.15: If we do something that we have liberty to do, but causes distress to a brother, what does Paul essentially accuse us of doing? [Not acting in love toward our brother.]

Q v.17: What should be the characteristics of the “kingdom of God?” [Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit]

Q (Rhetorical): What good does it do if we go to church or study our Bibles and pray, unless our lives are filled with the Holy Spirit? That is what God wants. There is nothing else that will enable us to live a life of power and peace.

Q: So if a Christian is lacking peace and joy, what must he do to have that joy and peace? [No longer yield to the flesh, but rather to the Spirit]

Q v.19: Paul leads off with “therefore.” So if we’re not to be a stumbling block, and we’re to be characterized as believers filled with righteousness, peace and joy, then what is Paul’s admonition to all believers? [Make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification]

LOOK:

Paul reminds us that we shouldn’t major in the minors. The examples he gave in this text were non-moral issues. He reminds us that some people’s faith is less developed than others. Therefore, if we are engaging in an activity that would cause our fellow believer to stumble, he has commanded us to take the high road. He says, “Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way (v.13)” He also says, “Make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.”

The underpinning of these commands is to love, not judge – unless you hear false teaching. And for whatever this is worth: if the Lord decides He wants me to be His spokesperson to make someone aware of their sinful behavior, He will have the Holy Spirit prompt me. But you know what? I have been a Christian almost 35 years, and I don’t ever recall being invited by the Holy Spirit to sit down with someone and tell them they are sinning. There must be a reason! My assumption is that the Holy Spirit has the exclusive role to convict each of us when we’re sinning.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 560–561)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Edify One Another (Rom. 14:13–23)

If we stopped with the first admonition, it might give the impression that Christians were to leave each other alone and let the weak remain weak. But this second admonition explains things further. The emphasis is not on “master-servant” but on “brother.” It is the principle of brotherly love. If we love each other, we will seek to edify each other, build each other up in the faith. Paul shared several FACTS to help his readers help their brethren.

Christians affect each other (vv. 13–15). Note the possible ways we can affect each other. We can cause others to stumble, grieve others, or even destroy others. Paul was speaking of the way the strong Christian affected the weak Christian. Paul dealt with a similar problem in 1 Corinthians 8–9, where the question was, “Should Christians eat meat that has been offered to idols in heathen temples?” There he pointed out that knowledge and love must work together. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Cor. 8:1, NIV). The strong Christian has spiritual knowledge, but if he does not practice love, his knowledge will hurt the weak Christian. Knowledge must be balanced by love.

Often little children are afraid of the dark and think there is something hiding in the closet. Of course, Mother knows that the child is safe; but her knowledge alone cannot assure or comfort the child. You can never argue a child into losing fear. When the mother sits at the bedside, talks lovingly to the child, and assures him that everything is secure, then the child can go to sleep without fear. Knowledge plus love helps the weak person grow strong.

“There is nothing unclean of itself,” Paul wrote (Rom. 14:14). No foods are unclean, no days are unclean, no people are unclean. (Read Acts 10 to see how Peter learned this lesson.) What something *does* to a person determines its quality. One man may be able to read certain books and not be bothered by them, while a weaker Christian reading the same books might be tempted to sin. But the issue is not, “How does it affect me?” so much as, “If I do this, how will it affect my brother?” Will it make him stumble? Will it grieve him or even destroy him by encouraging him to sin? Is it really worth it to harm a brother just so I can enjoy some food? No!

Christians must have priorities (vv. 16–18). Like the Pharisees of old, we Christians have a way of majoring in the minor (Matt. 23:23–24). I have seen churches divided over matters that were really insignificant when compared with the vital things of the Christian faith. I have heard of churches being split over such minor matters as the location of the piano in the auditorium and the serving of meals on Sundays. “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink” (Rom. 14:17). “But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do” (1 Cor. 8:8, NIV)

Not the externals, but the eternal must be first in our lives: righteousness, peace, and joy. Where do they come from? The Holy Spirit of God at work in our lives (see Rom. 5:1–2). If each believer would yield to the Spirit and major in a godly life, we would not have Christians fighting with each other over minor matters. Spiritual priorities are essential to harmony in the church.

Christians must help each other grow (vv. 19–21). Both the strong believer and the weak believer need to grow. The strong believer needs to grow in love; the weak believer needs to grow in knowledge. So long as a brother is weak in the faith, we must lovingly deal with him in

his immaturity. But if we really love him, we will help him to grow. It is wrong for a Christian to remain immature, having a weak conscience.

An illustration from the home might help us better understand what is involved. When a child comes into a home, everything has to change. Mother and Father are careful not to leave the scissors on the chair or anything dangerous within reach. But as the child matures, it is possible for the parents to adjust the rules of the house and deal with him in a more adult fashion. It is natural for a child to stumble when he is learning to walk. But if an adult constantly stumbles, we know something is wrong.

Young Christians need the kind of fellowship that will protect them and encourage them to grow. But we cannot treat them like “babies” all their lives! The older Christians must exercise love and patience and be careful not to cause them to stumble. But the younger Christians must “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). As they mature in the faith, they can help other believers to grow. To gear the ministry of a Sunday School class or local church only to the baby Christians is to hinder their growth as well as the ministry of the more mature saints. The weak must learn from the strong, and the strong must love the weak. The result will be peace and maturity to the glory of God.

Christians must not force their opinions on others (vv. 22–23) There are certain truths that all Christians must accept because they are the foundation for the faith. But areas of honest disagreement must not be made a test of fellowship. If you have a sincere conviction from God about a matter, keep it to yourself and do not try to force everybody else to accept it. No Christian can “borrow” another Christian’s convictions and be honest in his Christian life. Unless he can hold them and practice them “by faith,” he is sinning. Even if a person’s convictions are immature, he must never violate his conscience. This would do great damage to his spiritual life. For example, the mature Christian knows that an idol is nothing. But a young Christian, just converted out of pagan idolatry, would still have fears about idols. If the strong believer forced the new Christian to eat meat sacrificed to an idol, the younger Christian would experience problems in his conscience that would only further weaken it (see 1 Cor. 8–9).

Conscience is strengthened by knowledge. But knowledge must be balanced by love; otherwise it tears down instead of building up. The truth that “all foods are clean” (Rom. 14:14, 20) will not of itself make a Christian grow. When this truth is taught in an atmosphere of love, then the younger Christian can grow and develop a strong conscience. Believers may hold different convictions about many matters, but they must hold them in love.

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 493–494). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2. WITHOUT HINDERING (14:13–23)

Paul’s warning against judging relates to Christians’ attitudes and actions toward the convictions of other believers (vv. 1–12). The other side of the coin is evaluating the impact of one’s own convictions and actions on other Christians. In this section Paul warned against causing other Christians to stumble (hindering their spiritual growth) by asserting that one is free to live in accord with convictions not shared by other believers.

14:13–14. Paul’s opening sentence is both the final charge on the previous subject and the introduction to the new one: **Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on** (*krinōmen*,

“condemning”) **one another** (pres. tense subjunctive, “no longer let us keep on judging or condemning one another”). **Instead** a Christian should judge *himself* and his actions so that he does not place a **stumbling block** (*proskomma*, lit., “something a person trips over”; cf. 1 Cor. 8:9 and comments on Rom. 14:20–21) **or obstacle** (*skandalon*, lit., “trap, snare,” and hence “anything that leads another to sin”; cf. 16:17) **in his brother’s way** (lit., “to the brother”).

Returning to the subject of food (14:2–3, 6), Paul expressed his own conviction (cf. v. 5) as a Christian **that no food** (lit., “nothing”) **is unclean** (*koinon*, “common”) **in itself** (cf. Acts 10:15; Rom. 14:20; 1 Cor. 8:8). The problem, however, is that not all Christians—especially some from a Jewish heritage—shared Paul’s conviction. Therefore Paul properly concluded, **But if anyone regards** (lit., “but to the one reckoning”) **something as unclean** (“common”), **then for him it is unclean** (cf. Titus 1:15). But if someone persisted in holding that conviction, he could bring harm to others. That is the point Paul made next (Rom. 14:15–18).

14:15–18. How should a Christian whose convictions allow him to eat everything respond to one with scruples against certain foods? In Christian love he ought to forgo his liberty in Christ to avoid being a spiritual hindrance to his spiritual **brother**. If he persists in exercising his liberty so that his brother **is distressed** (*lypeitai*, “grieved, hurt”), Paul concluded, then the Christian exercising his liberty **is no longer acting** (lit., “walking”) **in love**. Such persistence could cause the spiritual destruction of a **brother for whom Christ died**. **Destroy** renders the word *apollue*, which often means eternal ruin. Here it may mean temporal ruin; a Christian forced to act contrary to his scruples, even though more strict than necessary, may find himself ruined by his wounded conscience (cf. 1 Cor. 8:10–12). Persisting in one’s freedom could also result in his Christian liberty (**what you consider good**) being blasphemed (**spoken of as evil**, *blasphēmeisthō*).

Such things should not happen. After all, food is not that important an issue (1 Cor. 8:8); it is **not** the sum and substance of **the kingdom of God**. But ... righteousness (upright living), **peace** (cf. Rom. 12:16, 18; 14:19) **and joy in** (the sphere of) **the Holy Spirit** (cf. 15:13) are essentials of Christian fellowship and harmony. A concerned believer insists on right conduct, harmony, and joy rather than forcing his own lifestyle on others. As a result the Christian **who serves** (pres. participle, *douleuōn*, “who keeps on serving as a slave”) **Christ in this way**—in Christian love, pursuing righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—**is pleasing** (cf. 12:1; 15:1; Heb. 13:21) **to God and approved by men** (in contrast with being evil spoken of, Rom. 14:16).

14:19–21. Continuing his emphasis on not hindering another Christian’s spiritual life, Paul urged his readers, **Let us therefore make every effort** (lit., “Let us keep on pursuing”) **to do what leads to peace** (lit., “the things of peace”; cf. v. 17) **and to mutual edification** (lit., “and the things of building up one another”; cf. 15:2; 1 Thes. 5:11). To Paul **food** and one’s personal convictions about it were not so important as the spiritual health of a fellow Christian and **the work of God**. Therefore **it is wrong** to insist on one’s personal freedom in Christ concerning food (**all food is clean**; cf. Rom. 14:14, “no food is unclean”) and drink if it **causes someone else to stumble** (*proskommatos*, “a stumbling block”; cf. vv. 13, 21). **Meat or drink or anything else** should be put aside if it causes a **brother to fall** (*proskoptei*, “stumble”; cf. *proskomma*, in vv. 13, 20). At times one’s Christian liberty must be relinquished for the sake of others. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive” (1 Cor. 10:23). And “be careful ... that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Cor. 8:9).

14:22–23. Concerning personal convictions in areas where different views exist, Paul concluded, **So whatever you believe about these things** (lit., “The faith that you have,” or “Do

you have faith?") **keep between yourself and God**. A Christian must not insist on influencing a believer with tighter scruples to change his ways. It should be something "in his own mind" (v. 5), for he lives "to the Lord" (v. 8). Paul considered a Christian like himself who had a clear conscience on such matters **blessed** (lit., "happy"). On the other hand, a Christian **who has doubts is condemned** (perf. pass. verb, "stands condemned") **if he eats**. If a Christian eats food or does anything when he has doubts in his own mind as to whether it is right or wrong before God (one who is "weak" in faith, vv. 1–2), his action does **not** spring **from** (*ek*, "out of") his **faith** or trust in God and is therefore wrong. As Paul generalized, **Everything that does not come from** (*ek*, "out of") **faith is sin**. The principle is, "When in doubt, don't." The "strong" Christian (15:1) is wrong if he causes a weak brother to sin (by doing something while doubting, 14:20), and a weak brother (vv. 1–2) who goes against what he doubts also sins (v. 23).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 1702). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

14:4, 13–14 When he forbade judging, Paul did not mean Christians must not call a sin a sin. (See the article "Who Are You to Judge Others?" p. 1417) The context concerns Jewish practices such as dietary regulations, Sabbath keeping, and feasts—"doubtful issues" (v. 1)—that troubled many new (especially Jewish) Christians. Some believed they should remain kosher, while others thought differently. Paul insisted these are individual, non-moral matters for each believer to decide, for each one will give an account to God, not to other Christians (vv. 10–11). Since Jesus declared that nothing is unclean in itself (see Mt 15:11; Mk 7:19), what one chooses to eat or not eat is a matter of personal preference.

But we cannot take Paul's conclusion to cover any and all actions. That is, we cannot say that believers may engage in anything they wish as long as they hold the personal opinion that it is acceptable. Sin is never permissible for a Christian. At the same time, mature Christians have a responsibility not to flaunt what they are free to do before God in ways that harm other Christians (14:15, 20–21; 1 Co 8).