

Romans

I. Living Godly In The World & Church

A. Romans 14:13-23 . . . Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. [14] I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. [15] For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. [16] Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; [17] for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. [18] For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. [19] So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. [20] Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. [21] It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. [22] The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. [23] But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

B. Review:

1. The essence of Paul's message in Romans 14:1-15:13, is that it is acceptable for Christians to differ as to which non-essential freedoms their conscience will allow them to practice and which ones their conscience won't allow them to practice.
2. From Romans 14:1–15:13, Paul presents a variety of ways of looking at this issue and principles for dealing with this issue.
 - a. In 14:1-4, Paul tells each group to accept each other rather than judge each other as if the other group were doing something wrong or sinful. And the guiding principle is that on matters of non-essentials, the only one we answer to is our master, Jesus Christ.
 - b. In 14:5, the principle Paul presents is that our decisions about which non-essentials we will participate in are to be based on being fully convinced in our own mind and conscience.
 - c. In 14:6, the principle is that whatever we have chosen to do, we are to do it for the Lord.

- d. In 14:7-9, Paul explains why our spirituality is validated when what we do with the non-essentials is done unto the Lord – it is because Christ died to be our Lord so that we no longer live or die for ourselves, but for Him.
 - e. In 14:10-12, the principle Paul presents is that we ought not to judge each other on non-essential matters because we all have to give an account to God for our choices and behavior on the final judgment day.
- C. And this brings us to our study today where Paul presents the stumbling block principle (vs 13-14), the love principle (vs 15), the “live in peace and edify one another” principle (vs 16-19), and the “live according to the faith you have” principle (vs 22-23).
- D. Prayer

II. Living godly in the church in the face of non-moral differences

- A. Romans 14:13 . . . Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.
1. When Paul forbids judging back in vs 4, he is speaking to the weak in faith. But here in vs 13, he seems to be talking to both groups – the weak in faith and the freer in faith.
 2. However, as soon as he finishes the statement about not judging, he turns his focus on the freer in faith. And this time, the principle for maintaining unity on non-essential issues is – the freer in faith are to make sure they do not put an obstacle or stumbling block in their weaker in faith Christian brother’s way.
 3. Because Paul uses two different words – obstacle and stumbling block in this phrase, we will look at how these two words differ.
 - a. According to its Greek definition, an obstacle is an occasion for stumbling. For example, if the weaker in faith believes it is sinful to drink alcoholic beverages, you would be putting an obstacle in his way (an occasion to go against his conscience) by inviting him to a gathering where you will serve beer and wine and where most everyone in attendance will partake of one or the other.
 - b. Again, according to its Greek definition, a stumbling block is the part of a trap to which the bait is attached, and which when touched, springs the trap. When used figuratively, and in relation to non-essentials, a stumbling block refers to leading another person into doing what he believes and his conscience agrees is forbidden, sinful, and displeasing to God.

- c. For example, after three or four rousing games of volleyball on a hot summer day, you pass out cold beers to everyone, including your weaker in faith Christian brother who you know feels it is wrong to drink alcohol of any kind. But because everyone else is drinking a beer, and because you tell him it is okay to have one, he drinks one too – but feels guilty afterward.
 4. Though providing an obstacle or being a stumbling block on a non-essential issue is not the same as leading or encouraging a Christian to participate in more obvious, biblically and socially condemned sin, it still results in doing spiritual damage to the one who is weaker in faith. Therefore, the principle Paul is presenting here is, “In relation to the non-essential freedoms we have in Christ, do not put another believer in a tempting situation, and do not directly tempt him to go against his conscience.
- B. Then Paul assures those freer in faith that he completely and personally agrees with their understanding of the freedoms they have in Christ. But he doesn’t stop with this affirmation of agreement. He goes on to say that in spite of what those freer in faith know, it is wrong for the weaker in faith to participate in any freedom that he believes is not God approved.
 1. In other words, Paul is saying that even though all things are clean, they are unclean for the one who thinks they are unclean – and the freer in faith are to deal with the weaker in faith accordingly.
 2. Romans 14:14 . . . I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.
 3. Before Paul wrote Romans, Jesus told this parable: “There is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.”
 - a. Afterward, the disciples asked Jesus to explain it to them. In response, Jesus said, “Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?”
 - b. Then, before continuing the story Mark (Mark 7:19) adds this comment: “Thus He (Jesus) declared all foods clean.”
 - c. Now if Jesus said that eating OT forbidden foods does not defile us, what does defile us? Jesus went on to say that it is the evil within which proceed out us that defiles us (Mark 7:14-23).
 4. The point here is that the sin or evil is not in what you eat or don’t eat, or in the days you do or don’t observe. In relation to the non-

essentials, the sin or evil is in going against your beliefs and values related to what you eat and the days you observe. And this is why we are not to put another believer in a tempting situation or directly tempt him to go against his conscience.

5. Now before moving on to the next principle, I want to point out that Paul is building up to a vital truth related to living by faith. And in essence this truth states that compromising or going against your conscience on issues that are non-essential and therefore not a sin, is for you, equal to committing a sin.

C. Romans 14:15 . . . For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.

1. This next principle that the freer in faith are to use in dealing with the weaker in faith is the love principle – and the standard of this love is “doing no wrong to a neighbor” (Romans 13:10).
2. Now according to vs 15, this principle has two parts.
 - a. Part 1: Because of love for those weaker in faith, we are to refrain from some of the freedoms that are rightfully ours to enjoy so as not to harm them spiritually.
 - b. Part 2: Because Christ set the example of loving them enough to die for them, we are to follow His example and love them enough to sacrifice some of our freedoms for them.

D. These last two principles that we have just looked at are stated in a fuller way by Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth, and so I want to read this portion to you. 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 . . . Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant (we look down on those who we think don't know as much as we do), but love edifies (builds up, makes another stronger). [2] If anyone supposes that he knows anything, [the fact is] he [does not yet know] as he ought to know (he doesn't know as much as he thinks he knows); [3] but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him (God knows him because he is living righteously). [4] Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. [5] For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through (by means of) Him. [7] However not all

men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. [8] But food will not commend us to God (food does not put us in good standing with God) we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. [9] But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? [11] [Therefore,] through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. [12] And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

- E. Romans 14:16-19 . . . Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; [17] for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. [18] For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. [19] So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.
1. Though there are some interesting and important things to notice in these four verses, and the essence of these four verses make up the principle of living in peace and edify one another – which Paul clearly states in vs 19: “Pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”
 - a. Does this mean we cannot enjoy all the freedoms we have in Christ? NO! We can enjoy them!
 - b. However, what matters more than enjoying all the freedoms we have in Christ is to be righteous, peaceable, and full of joy even if we must set aside some of our freedoms for the spiritual edification of, and to live in peace with, those weaker in faith.
 2. You see, we are not just NT Christians who are free from some of the OT constraints of the Law and some of the constraining fears of the Gentiles who once served idols. Far more than that –
 - a. We are members of the Body of Christ, and we are citizens of God’s kingdom, and we are servants of Jesus Christ who are acceptable to God when we serve Jesus according to His will.
 - b. And in addition, it is not what we eat or drink or what days we observe that puts us in good standing with God. What puts us in good standing with God is the serious pursuit of a righteous

life, and putting forth an honest effort to be at peace with all men (so far as it depends on us), and finding our joy in the indwelling presence and work of the Holy Spirit rather than in such earthly things as food and drink.

3. Before moving on, I want to direct your attention to two scriptures – one that directly and one that indirectly calls us to behave in such a way as to be in good standing with God and those around us.
 - a. Proverbs 3:3-4 . . . Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, [4] so you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man.
 - b. Romans 12:17b-18 . . . Respect what is right in the sight of all men. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

- F. Romans 14:20-21 . . . [20] Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. [21] It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.
 1. As in vs 14, Paul affirms that all things are clean, but they are unclean to the one who believes them to be unclean. Here in vs 20, Paul affirms all things are clean, but they become a cause of sin for the one who participates in this freedom to the spiritual harm of his weaker in faith fellow Christian.
 2. Then in vs 21, Paul states his next principle, which is, “The best way to live out your faith regarding the freedoms you have in Christ is to refuse to participate in any freedom that is offensive to someone weaker in faith and so causes him to stumble.
 3. In other words, all things are clean – and that is an unchangeable fact! But any one of them can become evil for the freer in faith Christian, if participating in it gives an offense and in so doing, causes someone who is weaker in faith to stumble.
 4. And this brings us to the last two verses of Romans 14. If you recall, I said earlier that Paul was building up to a vital truth related to living by faith, and this truth is, that compromising or going against your conscience on issues that are non-essential and therefore not a sin, is equal to committing a sin.
 5. In these next two verses, Paul affirms this truth with a statement that is profound: “whatever is not from faith is sin.”

- G. Romans 14:22-23 . . . The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. [23] But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.
1. In these two verses, Paul is presenting the final principle of chapter 14. He goes on to present two more principles in Romans 15, but this is the last one here in Romans 14.
 - a. And the principle is this: Live according to the faith you have, because if you don't, you will both commit sin and condemn yourself as a sinner.
 - b. In other words, if you believe, that is, if you are fully convinced in your mind and conscience that it is wrong to do something – which God actually approves of (such as eat meat offered to idols or to eat pork or to drink alcoholic beverages or treat all days the same), then live according to what you believe regardless of what other Christians are doing.
 - c. Should you compromise your convictions and conscience by doing what you believe is wrong – even though in God's eyes it isn't, and even though other Christians are doing it – you not only sin, you condemn yourself – because in your mind and conscience you believe it is wrong.
 2. Paul brings Romans 14 to a close with these profound words: “Whatever is not of faith is sin.”
 - a. This final statement is important, not just to the final principle here in chapter 14, but to the whole cause of Christ, and to the life of faith, and to the spiritual integrity of the individual Christian, and to the purity of the church.
 - b. And it is important because the whole of the Christian life is to be lived by faith – faith in God's goodness and righteousness and love, faith in God's commands, and faith in what our sound thinking and conscience lead us to do in relation to the non-essential freedoms we have in Christ. Therefore, to live any other way than by faith (in God) is to live as a sinner.

III. Conclusion

- A. 1 Timothy 1:5 . . . But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.