

Romans 14:13-23

INTRODUCTION

Last week we learned that Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome were turning against one another. Their dispute was that the Jewish Christians did not feel comfortable eating the meat and wine in Rome, which was dedicated to idols. They had a long tradition of eating foods prepared a certain way and they felt very uneasy about the Roman cuisine.

The Gentile Christians did not have a problem eating the food in Rome. They prayed before they ate and then ate whatever they wanted knowing that God created everything.

The Jewish Christians were trying to make all kinds of food rules for the Gentile Christians and the Gentile Christians were taking the foods that Jewish Christians were uncomfortable with and sort of sticking it in their face. In essence they were judging one another. They did not care to try to see things from the other's perspective. Divisions were beginning to form over food issues. Paul rebukes them both in this chapter for judging one another when they should have been working together and giving one another some grace and understanding.

Romans 14

12 Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. 13 So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.

Each of us will give an account to God. People already have a judge. They don't need another one. It is ok to speak the truth to one another and give good honest feedback, but the word judgment means that we are treating a fellow believer the same as we would treat one who is condemned

to hell. When we say in our heart; “the heck with that person” and write them off, that is condemnation. When we decide to see a person from only a negative perspective and we can’t wait to sneak in something bad about that person when they come up in a conversation, we have condemned that person.

Instead of writing off a person or seeing only the negative we need to try to see things from his or her perspective and do whatever we can to help them stand in their faith.

14 I know and am convinced on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong. 15 And if another believer is distressed by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you eat it. Don’t let your eating ruin someone for whom Christ died. 16 Then you will not be criticized for doing something you believe is good.

Paul wants people to know all food is clean. One of Paul’s greatest struggles was with Jews who tried to convince people in the church they were not saved unless they followed the Old Testament laws about circumcision and what foods to eat and many other rules that were in the Old Testament but are no longer required after the coming of Jesus Christ.

It is a good thing that Jesus has declared all food clean for us to eat. However, it is not ok to stick our freedom in someone else’s face. If you are at a potluck with someone who is Jewish, don’t stick your pork chop under their nose. Keep your beliefs to yourself and eat your pork chop at home. The same guidelines apply to table wine or any other potentially divisive or disputable issue. Act in a way that will bring unity and demonstrate love and understanding.

WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT FOOD

Does it strike you as odd that in the Roman church there was so much focus on rules about food? Disputes like this one can take so much of our time and energy that it is all we are talking about. The things that we talk about the most are a good indication of where we are with Christ.

If what we talk about most is second-guessing the decisions of other people then our hearts are full of judgment. We are focusing on people and how we could have done a much better job of things than they did.

If we are talking about people, then we are probably not talking about God. Most churches gradually slip into the pattern of focusing on the wrong things without even realizing it has happened. The church has practical matters to take care of. We have to talk about insurance, and money stuff, and repairs on the building and policies about who can use the building and who is supposed to clean up after the service. None of that is bad but if we are not careful and very prayerful we will spend more time talking about policies than we spend on talking about God and his power and his glory and his work.

That is the point of verse 17. Paul says that the church of God should not have to spend so much of its time and focus making rules about food or anything. If we love one another and respect one another then we won't have to put all of this energy and time into resolving disputes. In verse 17 Paul tells us what we should be talking about and focusing on.

17 For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Notice the term "Kingdom of God." With the exception of verse 17 this chapter is about resolving things that went wrong. It is about dealing with a church that has lost its focus. But verse 17 is the verse that tells us

what the church should focus on. What is the focus of the church supposed to be? The church is supposed to focus on The Kingdom of God.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM?

The followers of Jesus thought He came to set up a kingdom and an army that would rule the world from Jerusalem. When Jesus returns he will sit upon a visible throne ruling a visible kingdom. Until his return Jesus is choosing not to be visible to people. When we are given the faith to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation we serve a king who is not visible to the human eye. The primary way in which our king makes himself visible to this world is when we walk in his kingdom power.

Right now the visible work of our king is most often seen through things that happen to and through the people who belong to God that can only be explained by the power of His Holy Spirit. Let me name a few of these things that confirm that our king has come and our king rules and reigns in power. **Matthew 12:28 *But if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you.***

Fruit of The Holy Spirit

Gifts of The Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 1 Corinthians 2

1When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. 2For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but

with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

God's Presence in The Spiritual Disciplines

The Transforming Power of God's Salvation

Stuff That Happens When We Pray

Stuff That God Is Doing That We Are Unaware Of

HOW DO WE WALK IN THE POWER OF THE KINGDOM?

Focus on God. Work toward knowing and doing his will. When you do his will, you will walk in His power.

WHAT DOES THIS DO FOR THE CHURCH?

Goodness peace and joy are part of the kingdom reign of Jesus Christ. They are things that we cannot give ourselves or drum up in the flesh. They are fruit of the Holy Spirit. They are not fruit of trying hard in the flesh.

When we focus on the King and focus on what the King is doing and try to discern what our king wants us to do, then we will not be finding fault with one another. We will not be making major issues out of what should be easy stuff to deal with. Our focus will be on our king and the result will be peace and joy from The Holy Spirit. And people will see the King.

18 If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too. 19 So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.

When we have the goal in mind of doing what will build someone up, then nothing will pull our focus off of the kingdom. Disputes will be resolved without special meetings. It is not loving to second guess one another. It is not loving to walk away from brothers or sisters because we don't like how something was done. It is most loving to stay engaged and work things out so that in the end things will be resolved and we can focus on the kingdom and glory of Jesus.

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THE KINGDOM IS THE MESSAGE TO PREACH

Matthew 10:7 *7 Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near.,*

Luke 10:1 *¹ The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit. 2 These were his instructions to them: “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields. 3 Now go, and remember that I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. 4 Don’t take any money with you, nor a traveler’s bag, nor an extra pair of sandals. And don’t stop to greet anyone on the road. 5 “Whenever you enter someone’s home, first say, ‘May God’s peace be on this house.’ 6 If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you. 7 Don’t move around from home to home. Stay in one place, eating and drinking what they provide. Don’t hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay. 8 “If you enter a town and it welcomes you, eat*

whatever is set before you. 9 Heal the sick, and tell them, ‘The Kingdom of God is near you now.’ 10 But if a town refuses to welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 ‘We wipe even the dust of your town from our feet to show that we have abandoned you to your fate. And know this—the Kingdom of God is near!’ 12 I assure you, even wicked Sodom will be better off than such a town on judgment day.

THE KINGDOM IS PROMINENT

2 Peter 1:10,11 ¹⁰ So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. 11 Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:6 ⁶ He has made us a Kingdom of priests for God his Father. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

Hebrews 12:28 ²⁸ Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe.

TAKING IT HOME

1. When you think about the conversations you have had recently about church matters, has it been focused on people and what they are doing and not doing or should be doing or should be doing better? Or is are your conversations focused on what you notice that God has done, or is doing, or is going to do?
2. When is the last time you really experienced the peace and joy of God? Not a circumstantial peace, but the peace and joy of God that no

circumstance can take away from you. Walking in God's power and peace and joy of God is what we must focus on. If we don't have that, then we are giving something away, but it is not the kingdom of God.