

Romans 14:13-23 (Part 2)

INTRODUCTION

Last week we stopped somewhere around verse 8. Actually Romans 14 divides neatly into two sections. Verses 1-12 are addressed mostly to the Jewish Christians. And 13-23 is addressed mostly to the Gentile Christians. We got through verse 9 last week so let's begin with verse 10.

10 So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer?

A believer cannot be condemned. To be condemned means to be judged as guilty, sentenced and facing punishment. The bible says there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Because of cultural differences and disputable matters, believers were looking down on one another and awful-iz-ing fellow believers. Jewish Christians were treating Gentile Christians just like they were not believers. They cast doubt on their faith because the Gentile Christians had differences of opinion about minor issues.

AWEFUL-IZ-ING

We might think the Jewish and Gentile Christians were being very petty and silly. However, I have seen people turn against one another because they disagreed on what time the service should begin or what type of music to play or what persons should serve on a certain committees or the timing of the rapture. I have seen people quit a church because another member did not return their wave. It was later discovered that they had tinted windows in their car and it was impossible for anyone to see them wave let alone know that they should wave back.

It is not our job to cast doubt on the faith of one another. Now some people have legitimate suggestions about how we can more effectively serve

the Lord and serve one another. The truth is never the problem and we have to learn to be open with each other. You can say just about anything to a person if it is said in genuine love. But we also have to remember that second-guessing those who are trying to serve the Lord is not a ministry.

Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For the Scriptures say, “‘As surely as I live,’ says the LORD, ‘every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God.’”

Quoting from Isaiah 45:23, Paul explains that a time of judgment will come. Isaiah referred to the day when all the nations (or gentiles) would bow before God. It was God’s original intention to bring all the people to himself through Abraham, but the Jews had discarded God’s message to the Gentiles. We must never reject those whom God has accepted. We are to confront one another in love, concern, and truth, but not in judgment.

12 Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.

One day we will all stand before our holy God. Our lives will be replayed. We will see the end result of when we reached out in love to one another. And we will see the end result of the times we acted selfishly or gave into sin. And we will see the ripple effect our actions had on many lives. There will be many tears on that day. But in the end God will dry our tears.

1 Cor. 3:13 Our works tested with fire.

ROMANS 14 SECTION TWO (VS. 13-23)

In verses 1-12 Paul’s main criticism is directed at the Jewish Christians who are called the weak because they did not have enough faith to consume un-kosher foods sold in Rome. They did not have enough faith to worship God on Sunday, as was the custom in many New Testament churches. They felt a need to keep many of the Old Testament holy days

even though the holy days had been fulfilled by Christ and were no longer necessary. Paul was not going to get down on them. After all, what harm can there be in eating only kosher foods or drinking only the wine that was handled in the ways prescribed in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers.

But Paul criticized them because they were standing in judgment of those who did not get hung up on the same rules. The Jewish Christians were casting doubt on the salvation of those who felt a freedom to eat any kind of meat or drink table wine or worship on Sunday instead of the Sabbath. Legalism can be a real trap. It is possible to love rules more than we love people. That is the trap that the Jewish Christians were falling into and they were treating Gentile Christians like they were not even saved.

In verses 13-23 Paul is going to focus on Gentile Christians who in this context are called the strong. Paul warns these believers not to use their liberty in a way that will bring spiritual harm to their weaker brothers and sisters. He wants them to use their freedom in a way that is respectful and sensitive to the Jewish Christians. Paul was concerned that if the Gentile Christians made fun of the Jewish Christians the Jewish Christians might just say; “the heck with it” and drop out of church altogether. Dropping out of fellowship is just what the devil loves. Like a lone calf that loses contact with the herd, Christians who do not fellowship with other Christians are more vulnerable.

The only way to discover our spiritual gifts is when we fellowship with other believers. The only way to live out 6 of the Ten Commandments is in fellowship with others. When the devil tries to lie to us and get us to focus on the negative things in our lives, God uses other Christians to remind us that Jesus loves us and things will work out well in the end.

The unity of believers in the church is one of the primary ways that God shows people what he is like. With that in mind, Paul confronts every behavior that might drive Christians away from fellowshiping with one another. He is determined to guard the unity of the church.

I have mentioned some very practical matters that apply to our every day life. For a change of pace let me show you something I discovered in this text that has to do with the style in which Paul wrote this chapter. I like to keep things really practical but once in a while it is worth showing you some of the different things that you can look for when you are studying the bible.

CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF ROMANS 14

Paul organized part of this chapter in what is called a chiastic sequence. A Chi is the letter X in Greek. So a chiastic sequence of words is repeated ideas that cross over one another like the letter X. This chiastic structure is used both in Hebrew poetry and when making a strong case in such a way that it will stick in our minds. Here is what that looks like.

Chiastic Order of Chapter 14:13-21

A Warning about stumbling blocks (vs. 13b)

B. Nothing is unclean (vs. 14a)

C. Don't destroy one for whom Christ died (vs. 15b)

C Don't tear down the work of God (vs. 20a)

B. All things are clean (Vs. 20b)

A. Don't do anything to caused a believer to stumble (vs. 21)

You can see how Paul emphasizes three main ideas by repeating them in reverse order. Paul uses literary devices such as this to help us remember what he said.

VERSES 13-16 DON'T BE A STUMBLING BLOCK

If we had to give a title to verse 13-16 it might be something like; “don’t be a stumbling block.” What is a stumbling block? I have to admit that outside the church I have never heard a person use the term “stumbling block.” A stumbling block is any obstacle that slows down or stops a person from getting to where they want to go. It could be like the cement road dividers that are put in front of the white house so that no one can drive up to the capital building with a car bomb. Or it can be like walking through the forest after the wind has blown down many trees, or after it has been clear-cut.

When it sounded like my dog was in some sort of trouble, I walked though the land behind us that had been clear-cut so that I could see what was going on. There are all kinds of discarded trees lying across each other mixed with heavy brush, rocks and stumps. It took me about 20 minutes to go just about a hundred yards. I was tripping, and snagging my clothes and turning my feet. I can’t stand to walk through woods like that because it takes so much energy to get to the destination. Let’s talk about how that applies to the church context.

The mission of the church is really pretty simple. Focus on God and his kingdom. Love God, love people and invite more to come. That is really about it. But when we get into all kinds of arguments about disputable matters it is like that walk in the woods. When we are more worried about getting our way or keeping up appearances or gossiping about others It makes our Christian journey difficult because we are tripping over one another’s egos and offending one another and it slows us down from what should be an uncomplicated walk with The Lord.

When we put offenses and judgments and assumptions on one another our Christian walk is like walking over fallen logs through heavy brush laid over stumps and rocks. Our goal should be to clear away the things that will slow people down in their walk with the Lord.

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.

Verse 13 is Paul's summary of verses 1-12. It is also his introduction to what comes next. Do not treat fellow Christians like they are rejected by God and going to hell. Instead, do what you can to make their walk easier.

VERSES 17-18 THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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.

Ok, this is what the focus of the church should be. A lot of time in the Christian Church of Rome was dedicated to figuring out the menu for the people. Can you imagine if we had to have lengthy special meetings to decide what type of food was more holy and Godly to serve at a picnic or a potluck? Can you imagine if we had a three-hour church meeting to decide what people should be able to cook for dinner in their own homes?

The kingdom of God is not about figure out what kind of food to eat. The kingdom of God is about the power of Holy Spirit changing us to think and act more like Jesus. The bible talks about a peace that passes all understanding. There have been times that I have been very troubled. I had a decision to make or I felt like I was under some sort of judgment or personal attack.

I remember one such time when I paced back and forth in my living room for hours. I was so troubled that I just felt like giving up. But I kept praying and asking God to give me back the joy of my salvation. After

wrestling with God for hours, suddenly and instantly I became aware of the presence of The Holy Spirit and shivers went up and down my spine and out of no where God supernaturally gave me joy and peace that I could not come up with on my own. I was no longer worried or preoccupied with my problems. I did not care if some people did not like me, God gave me the faith and the joy that I needed to keep going.

That is the kind of thing we have to give away. Not a list of rules about disputable matters. It is a list of ways that God will give us joy and peace no matter what we are going through.

18 If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Is there anyone right now in the church about whom you only have negative things to say? If so, what are you willing to do to stop condemning that person and begin to talk like grown up Christians about the specific things that are bothering you?
2. Did you realize that there are some things that God wants to do in our lives that will never happen outside the fellowship of the church?
3. With that in mind, what are you willing to do to guard the unity of the church, and to create an atmosphere where we major in the majors and minor in the minors?
4. 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.