

Stop Passing Judgment on One Another

Read Romans 14:1-12

Introduction: About a 150 years ago, a man by the name of Dwight L. Moody was having quite an impact on the world. Moody was known as a great evangelist. In the late 1850s in Chicago, Moody had a particular encounter. “Moody felt a need to tell everyone in his range of influence what they needed to do to live holier lives. He hated theaters, billiards, cards, and all such pastimes, and he never failed to make his point of view known. In later years he mentioned after his conversion—a confession that can be corroborated by his Chicago associates. A fellow clerk remembered that their zealous friend came “into the store one night from some religious meetings” to discover some of his friends involved in a friendly game of checkers. “In an instant he seized the board, dashed it to pieces, and before a word could be spoken, dropped upon his knees and began to pray.” Presumably the prayer was for the souls of his co-workers, not a confession of his own fiery, self-righteous temper.” (Dorsett p. 63-64)

And so it is today... While the church might not be arguing and dividing over checkers, Christians have almost always disagreed over non-essential issues.

– It seems to me that we as believers are like pendulums (grandfather clock). We swing from extreme to another. Some of us are believers that see everything as black and white, wrong or right. On the other hand, some us go to the other extreme of, “I’m free to do whatever I want”, even to see how far one can go without actually committing sin. Then sometimes in the midst of those two extremes, we find ourselves arguing, passing judgment, and despising one another.

MacArthur puts it like this, “The liberated believer is tempted to look upon his legalistic brother as being too rigid and restricted to be of any use to the Lord. The legalist, on the other hand, is tempted to think of his liberated brother as being too freewheeling and undisciplined to serve Christ effectively. This is the root of the disunity.”

What is the problem here in Romans 14? These believers were disagreeing over matters of opinions or disputable matters. These matters of opinion were not sin issues. Clearly, the Bible teaches that we ought to address sin in one another. These were gray areas, non-moral issues, personal preferences, or historic traditions. These matters were concerning areas that the Bible doesn’t forbid nor command. We would call these areas liberties or freedoms that God allows us to make our own personal decisions. And many times these matters of opinion are the very things that are dividing us in the church. It is just like Kent Hughes said so poetically, “*Believe as I believe, No more, no less; That I am right, And no one else, confess; Feel as I feel, Think only as I think; Eat what I eat, And drink what I drink; Look as I look, Do always as I do; Then, and only then, Will I fellowship with you.*” (P. 260)

– Historical background behind Romans 14: Jews held on to the Old Testament law concerning the Sabbath and dietary laws (ex. no pork). We should note culturally and historically, that because of the Jews convictions on these issues, they created their own separate communities away from everyone else. In response to that, Gentiles would often regard Jews as unsociable. The natural result of these actions brought separation between Jews and Gentiles.

V. 1 - Welcome One Another

Now the first thing Paul does is to command the believers in Rome to welcome or accept the one who is weak in faith. What does Paul mean by “*weak in faith*”? We need to first understand that Paul is addressing two different people groups. He addresses them as the “*weak in faith*” and the “*strong*”. The weak in faith are not necessarily one who is immature or lacking faith. Rather, this believer does not believe that his personal faith allows him to engage in certain specific practices. For example, certain believers believe that they should never work on Sunday. The New Testament doesn’t forbid working on Sunday, but they personally believe they shouldn’t in honor of God. We should also note that Paul likely addressed them as “weak in faith” because it was probably the label that the “strong” came up with. On the other hand, the “strong” are likely the majority in the group or the most dominant.

It is a tendency of the majority and dominant to look down on those who don’t believe the same way as them. So Paul commands that they welcome or accept the weak in faith. The Greek word for “welcome” (or receive) means to take into friendship. It means to accept in one’s society, in one’s home or circle of acquaintances. This same word was used in Acts 28:2 where the people of Malta welcomed Paul and Luke. “*The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all...*”

But notice in our text that we are not to welcome the weak in faith for the purpose of quarreling or for the purpose of trying to, as it were, “straighten them out.”

It doesn’t mean that we can’t discuss our differences or matters of opinions. For example, if someone were to ask me how I felt about a certain matter of opinion, I might say, “This is what I personally believe...” I might even give reasons why I think something is not a good idea. But I don’t want to begin to force my convictions on them or look down on them because they didn’t come to the same conclusion as I did.

V. 2-3 – Yet these believers would not tolerate each others' differences. Look at the particular issue in verse 2 & 3.

“One person believes they could eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.”

Paul describes their attitudes and behaviors with each other as despising and passing judgment on one another. So instead of welcoming one another they were look down on one another. Instead of accepting one another they were finding fault and condemning one another probably to the point separating from one another. You can almost see it.

V. 3 – Now, we need to notice the first reason Paul gives for welcoming one another. Notice at the end of verse 3 *“...for God has welcomed him.”* Here is the standard for receiving one another. God obviously doesn't make an issue of these matters of opinion. If God welcomes the weak why shouldn't the strong. And if God welcomes the strong why shouldn't the weak.

It is almost as if Paul is prepping them for what he going to say later. For in verse 17, Paul states, *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

V. 4 – The second reason Paul gives for welcoming each other is that the Lord will uphold or sustain them all. In verse 4, Paul goes on to question the readers by asking them what right do they have to pass judgment on someone else's servant. It would have been outrageous in that day for someone to interfere in a relationship between a master and his slave. This is the classic example of a controlling personality that is interfering where they have no business interfering. (Note: Remember, there are times when we should interfere in each other's lives, but when it comes to matters of opinions we need to be careful.)

– Paul then states, *“It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”* With this statement you can see some of the underline thinking. The weak brother is thinking that the strong brother really can't serve the Lord effectively as long as he is so liberal in his beliefs and practices. On the other hand, the strong believer is thinking that the weak brother cannot effectively serve the Lord being so legalistic in his beliefs and practices. But Paul confronts them both with the truth that the Lord is able to make both of them stand. In 1 Cor. 4:3-5, Paul is being wrongly judged by some of the Corinthians, - *“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.”*

V. 5-6 – Be Fully Convinced

In verse 5, Paul moves to a different issue. This time the readers were disagreeing over the observance and non-observance of special days. The Jewish believer may have been still celebrating certain feasts and festivals of the Old Testament. In verse 6, Paul states that one who observes a day or eats, observes it in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

In verse 5 & 6, Paul is giving us three principles that we can use to determine whether we should engage in certain disputable matters. The first two principles are in verse 6. Here is the thank you test and give honor test. So whether I practice something or not, can I give thanks to God for this and can I honor the Lord for this. Paul here is emphasizing looking at the heart motivation and the intentions.

– The third principle has to do whether I should engage in a certain activity based on conscience. At the end of verse 5, Paul says that, *“Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”* So in these matters of opinions, if your conscience says it wrong to do it, then you shouldn't do it. If your conscience allows you to do it, and it is not sin, then you are free to do it.

We can put this whole subject like this... We as believers should not be imposing our own personal convictions on others. If we do this, we are tempting another believer to go against there conscience. Again, it is not that we can't discuss issues that we disagree on, but we can't impose our views on others and then pass judgment on them if they don't conform to our standards. It should be also noted, that Paul later is going to warn the strong brother, concerning his liberty, to be careful not to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

V. 7-9 – The reason we are obey our conscience, give thanks to God and honor the Lord with these decisions, is because we are the Lord's. Notice in verses 7-9, we don't live to ourselves and we don't die to ourselves. Christ is our Lord and Master and it is for Him that we are living.

At this point in the message, some one may be objecting. If you don't condemn some of these matters of opinions,

believers are going to head down a slippery slope. If you don't curb this or speak out against this or that, you will lead certain believers down the path of sin or to the path of legalism. But listen to what Paul said to the Colossians in 2:16, *"Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath."*

V. 10-12 – Each of Us Will Give An Account

Ok, verses 10-12 give us the final reason why we need to welcome one another and not despise and pass judgment on one another. Each of you will have to give an account himself to God. The text states that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess to God. This is what is known as the 'bema' seat of Christ in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 where Christians will be judged. Paul states, *"...each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."*

It is as if Paul is saying, "Quit worrying about what your brother or sister is doing, worry about yourself!" It is sad how many times we as believers will consume ourselves with the non-essentials of Christianity. When we begin passing judgment and despising each other, it is almost like saying we can't trust God to handle this brother or sister in Christ. It is like saying, I need to be their Lord and judge them. In essence, it is just like the child who can't worry about himself and is always concerned with what his brother or sister is doing or not doing. What does become evident is the sins of the heart like pride, and jealousy.

Application:

Well, I think it is fair to say that the issues at the church in Rome are not exactly the same as the issues we face today. But we do have similar matters of opinions in the church in America that Christians divide over.

Lets put these principles to the test.

- 1) Identify if the issue at hand is clearly forbidden or commanded in the Word of God.
- 2) If it is not clearly forbidden or commanded, then I need to obey my conscience.
- 3) If my conscience says it is wrong, then I should do it.
- 4) If my conscience permits me to do it, then I am free to do it as long as I don't cause my brother to sin.
- 5) Finally, I must be sure to welcome, be friend, and fellowship with those, even if I don't agree with them.

Examples:

Drinking Alcohol

Theater or watching certain TV shows

Music

Home school vs Public school vs Christian or private school

Tobacco

Card playing

Dancing

Fashion: Long hair, ear piercing for guys, nose piercing for girls, tattoos

Holidays: Christmas, Easter, Halloween;

Bible translations

Material wealth