

Stop Passing Judgment on One Another Part 2

Read Romans 14:13-23

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.

Example: Harry Potter series? Should Christians read Harry Potter books or watch the movies?

– A teenager or a young child at this point might say, well I don't have a problem with Harry Potter but my Mom & Dad say I can't read it. Well, it just became a moral issue because the Bible says to obey your parents.

Review 14:1-12

Concerning opinions, we are to welcome one another despite whether we agree or not. In other words, we are to receive or take into friendship, into our home, or into are very circle of friends those of different opinions.

Here are the 5 principles to guide us in disputable matters:

- 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 NOT 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.

Note: This whole text doesn't have any real significance to us until we talk about specifics issues of our day & culture.

Examples:

Drinking Alcohol

Watching certain movies and 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

On one hand, Romans 14 is extremely freeing. Nobody enjoys man-made rules. There has always been a great amount of bondage in church because of legalisms. Yet, ultimately this text is not about me. Paul reminds us that our greatest concern is our brother or sister in Christ. While I may be able to exercise some freedom in Christ, my first concern is not me, it is whether I will cause a brother or sister to sin.

The first section of chapter 14 concerns decisions I make between myself and the Lord. The second section concerns decisions between myself and my brother in Christ.

V. 13 - Decide Not to Cause Your Brother to Stumble.

“Therefore...” For the third time, Paul exhorts his readers concerning “not passing judgment”.

Decide, determine, make up your mind, or in essence make a resolution not to do anything that will hinder another's spiritual progress.

1 Cor. 8:9 - *“But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”*

Example: I have decided not to drink wine or any other alcoholic drink for fear that I might cause my brother to stumble.

I won't even do it in private because if anybody were to ask me if I drank I would have to tell them the truth of course.

And if someone knew I drank than I would be potentially encouraging someone that could cause them to sin.

1 Cor. 8:10 - *“For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?”*

V. 14-15 - Walk in Love

Paul states that nothing is unclean in itself. Here is a clear example of how important the context is to Bible interpretation. Paul is not suggesting that everything in this world is clean. Rather, in the context of non-moral issues everything is clean. Yet, even though something maybe clean, if someone's conscience says it is unclean then to them it is unclean.

1 Corinthians 8:4-7 -- "Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we give up. However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled."

In other words, give up your right to exercise your liberty.

Example: Christians playing cards/poker. Some might say... I have a right to play cards. But what should be exercised is love and concern for my brother's conscience not my rights.

Don't grieve, hurt, distress, or cause pain to your brother or sister in Christ over a non-moral issue. Do not hinder their spiritual growth on issues that don't matter.

Example: Not long after I became a Christian, I destroyed all my secular music. Some of it was bad, and I needed to destroy it. Some of it was fine, it wasn't Christian, but the lyrics were not bad. Yet, I started getting a chip on my shoulder when I was around Christians who would listen to secular music. My girlfriend at the time, Lisa, also got rid of some of her music, but she didn't want to get rid of a few songs she really liked. But I had come to the conclusion that Christians should only listen to Christian music. So I began to pressure her and in one sense "grieve" her by pushing her into what I felt was the right thing to do.

V. 16-19 - Don't Abuse Your Liberty Instead Mutually Build-up

Christian liberty is a good thing. But if you misuse your rights as a Christian, it may cause a good thing to be spoken as evil.

As Kent Hughes said, "...the Kingdom of God is not mainly a matter of externals but of eternal. – "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 5:6 -- "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*"

Paul then tells us what Kingdom living looks like. According to verse 19, it is pursuing those things that make peace and mutually build one another up.

Ephesians 4:3 -- "*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*"

V. 20-21 - Don't Destroy the Work of God

The Work of God is a reference to believers. In other words, Paul is saying to destroy and tear down believers over disputable matters. Rather, welcome one another. In verse 15, Paul reminded us that we are not to destroy the one for whom Christ died.

Verse 21 raises the standard on these disputable matters by saying not to do anything that would cause another to stumble.

Example: Charles Spurgeon was a cigar smoker. One day he was walking down the street when he saw a sign which read, "We sell the cigar that Charles Spurgeon smokes." From that point on, Spurgeon gave up smoking cigars. He didn't want is freedom to cause others to stumble.

V. 22-23 - Final Warnings to the Strong & Weak

To the Strong: Don't flaunt your liberty! Keep it to yourself. Care more about your weak brother than yourself.

To the Weak: Don't go against conscience! If it bothers your conscience don't do it.

Article 5 Policy

2. Disputable Matters

We believe that with respect to those things or activities where the Word of God neither commands nor forbids, believers have the freedom to judiciously and moderately use and enjoy them in accordance with the design for which our Creator God has given them (1 Timothy 4:4-5; James 1:17). Our use of these things is to be further regulated by the following biblical guidelines:

A. We will use them only when our conscience permits us, for it is neither right nor good to act against conscience (Acts 24:16; Romans 14:5,22-23).

B. We will use them only after considering whether it will cause my brother to stumble. We will not knowingly use those things that would cause my brother to stumble (Matthew 18:6-10; Romans 14:13, 21; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13).

C. We will use them only after carefully examining this particular thing or activity with the light of God's Word and after searching our own hearts. We want to make sure we are not using our liberty as an occasion to sinfully indulge our flesh (Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16).