



by Mercy

ROMANS 14:13-23

Devotional

Romans 14:13-23

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.

²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. ²² The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. ²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Day 1

ROMANS 14:13, 15, 20

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. ... ¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. ... ²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.

The image of a stumbling block is used at various moments throughout the Bible, but does not always mean the same thing. For example, 1 Peter 2:8 speaks of Christ as the stumbling block for non-believing Jews where stumbling means rejecting Jesus. So what does it mean here? Romans 14 speaks of a different kind of stumbling—not away from the faith, but away from fellowship. Notice verse 15. Our actions, even if allowed, can actually cause dear brothers and sisters in the faith to grieve. In their faith in God and love for a friend, they are saddened that the other would “eat/not eat.” They stumble and are grieved because they love. In verse 20 we are told that “everything is indeed clean” in this situation. Therefore the argument is not about which party is more correct. It is about whether their choices are made out of love and concern for how they will impact their fellow Christian.

- Can you think of a situation you have encountered where you disagreed with a fellow Christian? How did you navigate that experience? Was it a positive or negative experience for you and for them?
- Deciding whether something is right or wrong is only half the battle. After making that decision, we have to do the hard work of asking how to live out that truth lovingly. How does that challenge or affirm the way that you navigate your relationships? How does it point you to Jesus as your example?
- Though this task is often murky for us, remember that it is the gospel of Romans 1-11 that brings us to this point! Take a moment to reflect on how Jesus is the true marriage of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Prayer

Father, I confess that too often I act narrowly out of what is pleasing to me without regard for how my actions impact my family, my friends, my fellow believers, and my community. Forgive me for the way I have been blind to their grief, which really comes from their love for me and for You. Lord, this is your family for whom Jesus died. We need your love to bind us together. This week, help me to look to Jesus' example that I may walk in love. For the glory of Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 2

ROMANS 14:14, 20b

¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ... ^{20b} Everything is indeed clean,

Here Paul is concerned with whether food or drink are clean or unclean. In Leviticus ritual cleanliness had the fitness of something before the Lord, so the people were not allowed to eat certain animals that were considered unclean. The uncleanliness of certain animals was symbolic in that it represented the separation of Israel from the other nations. At the heart of Paul's argument in Romans is that through Jesus the Gentiles had become cleansed and grafted onto Israel, and because there was no longer a distinction between Israel and the other nations there was no longer any need for the food laws. This principle is demonstrated in Acts 10, where Peter is called to eat formerly unclean food in the context of the Gentiles coming to visit him. Ultimately because of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension we are all cleansed along with the creation. However, even while things are clean if your conscience cannot partake of something because you consider it unclean then you shouldn't partake of it.

Prayer

Most Holy God, thank you for sending your son to purify us from sin. Help me to recognize the freedom we have but also to have the wisdom to understand when and where I should participate.

Day 3

ROMANS 14:17-19

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

While the previous day's devotional was concerned with the idea of cleanliness I would argue that this passage is concerned with holiness. When something is holy it is separated for service to the Lord. So while all foods and drinks have been cleaned it is not in the freedom to do these things that the kingdom of God is made up of. Instead, it is in our service to God, through the Holy Spirit, that produces righteousness, peace, and joy. It is in our Holy service not our freedoms that help to build the kingdom of God. We know that our freedoms are not in service to the kingdom when they are not building up others.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the freedoms that we have through Christ. Help me to value the righteousness, joy, and peace of your kingdom over my freedom. Give me the wisdom and discernment to use those freedoms to build the kingdom.

Day 4

ROMANS 14:15b, 20a

^{15b} By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. ... ^{20a} Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God.

Destruction is serious. The destruction of the temple left many devastated and broken. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sins against Yahweh caused real hurt and damage. The destruction of the man traveling down the road, left him not only physically dismembered, but ignored by a priest and a Levite. When Paul chooses to use the word 'destroy' in this section it should carry this sort of seriousness, this sort of weight with it. Paul is saying that it is more important to fellowship, to come together and enjoy the company of one another and praise the Lord while together in that company. When we take disputable matters in regards to our following Jesus, and drive a wedge between ourselves and other Jesus followers, we are 'destroying' their faith. We are destroying 'the one for whom Christ died' and the 'work of God' in others lives.

- Today let's focus on repentance, turning from our divisiveness towards the unifying Jesus. Spend a moment thinking through the ways you judge others, differentiate yourself from other Jesus followers, and some of your strongly held "non-essential" practices and customs.
- We are constantly viewing other people's actions, choices and beliefs through an evaluative lens. Pray this morning that the prescription of your lens would be set by Jesus, not you. In what ways does Jesus see others?
- Read Psalm 139. Make that your prayer this morning. Consider it throughout the day. Petition God to 'search you' and your thoughts, and to reveal to you 'the grievous ways'. Ask God to lead you in the way everlasting, the way of love and mutual up building for the sake of the Gospel.
- Finally, share your confession with someone close to you. Work through your strong convictions and judgments that could destroy one another with one another. Offer this before the Lord, and ask Him to use this for His glory and your growth.

Prayer

Father in Heaven. I can see the ways I have erred. I can see the ways I have torn down another for the sake of my own personal comforts, beliefs and ways of living. I recognize that some of my actions, some of my words, some of my affiliations have destroyed the faith of brothers and sisters in Christ. Forgive me for this. Help me to see my grievous ways and lead me to the life everlasting (Psalm 139). Father hear my confession, lead me to repentance. Thank you that you are gracious and merciful with me, that your judgment of me is made through the blood of Christ. Give me the strength I need today to build up my brothers and sisters, that the glory of God, the truth of Jesus and the work of the Spirit may continue through our lives. It's in Christ's name I pray, Amen.

Day 5

ROMANS 14:22-23

²² The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. ²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Paul's concluding principle, "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin," is based on what he has already been developing as he writes to this diverse body of believers desiring to be a light to the dark world around. What would distinguish them? They would be a community of truth and love; the truth of the gospel would define love for Roman believers whose primary citizenship was now the kingdom of heaven.

Here God and others replace ourselves as the center of the universe. Paul has already stated these truths:

- Love is the fulfilling of the law.
- There is an urgency; the time is now.
- Each of us will give an account of himself to God.
- God's kingdom is not about external, legalistic practices, but is new life in Christ, characterized by right relationships, overflowing joy, and peace.

When we actually live by these truths, we are freed from the need to judge someone else by our own standards. Paul does not tell the stronger brother he cannot eat meat or drink wine at all, only in the presence of a brother whose conscience will not allow him to do it. Love is eager to enable others to have the clear conscience we ourselves desire, and sees differences as an opportunity. Together we can keep learning, keep growing, keep sharpening our consciences as we prepare for the day we will stand before the Lord.

Where have you been enriched by relating to a believer very different from you?

Are you sharpening your conscience by listening to God speak in His word day by day?

Prayer

Father in heaven, Your kingdom is everlasting because there is no sin or death. How we look forward to the day when we will live in perfect fellowship and freedom. Help us not to lose heart or grow weary as we work together to be a light in our dark world. And especially, teach us how to love each other for Jesus' sake. Amen