

# Romans 14:14-23

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[ 0 : 00 ] A very good morning. It's good to see you guys this day. If you're wondering, our crowd is sparse this morning, not because people are celebrating St. Patrick's Day, let's turn together in our copy of God's Word to Romans chapter 14.

We're actually going to finish chapter 14 today by looking at verses 13 through 23, but by way of reminder, recall how we've gotten to where we've gotten in the simplest way to summarize the first 11 chapters.

Paul sums it up in chapter 12 verse 1 by saying, the mercies of God, which is everything he's presented prior to that, I will say that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone forever.

In light of this, we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. Verse 1 of chapter 12, which is this vertical access response to what God has done for us in Christ.

We're to offer ourselves fully to him, right? Vertical access here, and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, which then plays out in the horizontal access of that offering, right?

[ 1 : 32 ] That now our lives are to be characterized by love. Chapter 12 verse 9, Paul exhorts us to let love be genuine, to abhor what is evil, and to cling fast to what is good, and therein he summarizes for us godliness.

To be characterized by this, loving genuinely, right? Which he then begins to play out for us throughout the rest of his letter to the Romans.

So last week we looked at the beginning of chapter 14, verses 1 through 12, to see these exhortations he gives, to welcome one another, to not despise one another, and to not pass judgment on one another.

You can see that in verses 1 through 3 and verse 5. About particular things, right? He's referring to opinions. Notice that there in verse 1, right?

About opinions. Not about doctrinal issues, not about things that are clearly taught to us in the Scriptures, but about those things that exist in the gray. Those issues that are not clearly spoken to in the Scriptures.

[ 2 : 44 ] He's exhorting us to welcome each other, not despise one another, and to not pass judgment on one another about opinions. The examples from the text are about eating and drinking, and the observance of particular days.

But of course we can see that that plays itself out in varying ways, as our culture is shifting.

Certainly it does. Now the teaching in here is not incredibly complex.

In fact, I told Wes earlier this week, I really just want to get up and read the text to you and say, okay. How it plays out in our lives, though, has a lot of complexity with it.

Lots of complexity. The application of the truths found in chapter 14 are not going to be easy to walk out together. So let's see if we can look at it together, wrap our minds around it together, so that we're best equipped to do so.

Let's begin by reading in verse 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.

[ 3 : 53 ] 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. 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. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. 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. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. 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. 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.

[ 4 : 58 ] Join me in prayer. Father God, we thank you for your holy word. We thank you that it was inspired by the Spirit, given to men to write, that this day we might open it and feast upon it.

I thank you that it is the sufficient source of guidance for our lives, that you have revealed to us in it all things we need to know to live godly before men.

That where it doesn't speak, we have latitude. Where it does, we are certainly called to obey. And so I pray this day that you'll help us each to apply the truths contained in the last half of chapter 14 as we exercise liberty amongst one another.

And I pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. So, we talked again last week about how we're meant to be interacting with our liberty.

Right? I think maybe I gave a fair amount of justification to be liberated. In fact, Paul calls the stronger brother, the one who practices liberty, who recognizes that he's been set free from bondage to periphery things, and now has freedom in Christ.

[ 6 : 13 ] The weak brother is the one who abstains because he's afraid of what may happen, who's still working out his faith in some sense by his work. Right?

I think, though, we're too quick as Christians to stand in camps of the can-dos and the can't-dos. We make lists, we make signs, and we beat each other up with them.

Right? And, specifically, Paul begins to address those who are the stronger brethren. Those who practice these liberties and how they ought to do so appropriately.

Now, before we get into the specific exhortation found in verse 13, I want to make an overarching observation from the text. Notice verse 14.

Paul says, So notice Paul says, So the question is, how does a clean thing, right, as Paul says, everything is clean, everything is permissible, become unclean or impermissible?

[ 7 : 26 ] How is it that that happens? And what we must notice here is that cleanliness and uncleanliness, or permissibility or impermissibility, is a matter of conscience and motive.

Verse 14. Anyone who thinks it unclean, to them it is, in fact, unclean. Verse 22 and verse 23 speak to our conscience before God, knowing that we've been given permission by him in the Spirit.

Let's look at some other texts. Titus 1.15. Paul writes, To the pure, all things are pure. But to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

Mark chapter 7, verse 15. There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.

This is Jesus speaking. There's nothing outside of a person by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him. And skip down to verse 18 and 19. And he said to them, Then are you also without understanding?

[ 8 : 35 ] Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart, but his stomach, and is expelled? Right? And then Mark adds the commentary, Thus he declared all foods clean.

So notice that what Jesus is saying is it's not those exterior things that ultimately really matter. What ultimately matters is our heart. And so the question must be asked, What do our actions, and in this text here, particularly about our liberty, say about our hearts?

What do they say about our faith? Do our actions say that our hearts are resting in God as our portion, our sufficiency, our satisfaction, our treasure?

Or do they say something else entirely? I'll give you an example from my own living. Many of you may not have noticed this, and that's quite alright, but I have tended to dress a little nicer as the years have gone on here when I preach.

There was a day, if you've been around for a while, that I wouldn't have tucked my shirt in, would have been collared, probably would have had my sleeves rolled up. I never wore open-toed shoes, so I kept the shoes on.

[ 9 : 51 ] This is not how I like to dress, though. And as time has gone on, I've felt the conviction that if somebody's going to not hear the gospel because I'm not wearing a tie, how dare I?

If this was a crowd that I thought required a jacket, I would do that too. I would stand up here and sweat because the gospel is that important to me. What do our actions say about where our hearts are?

What do our actions say about what is ultimately important to us? If I were to travel and speak, I would take a jacket with me, just to be sure I could cover that. If a King James-only church ever asked me to come speak there, I would probably talk to them about the scriptures, but I would do it from a King James-only Bible, because I would want them to hear the things that I'm saying to them because that is what is ultimately important to me.

My tie also gives me a place to clip my mic, which I appreciate. Verse 17 of our text says, the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking.

So we get too wrapped up into these periphery things and we miss the main point. Proverbs 4, 23 says, keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life.

[ 11 : 15 ] So it's a matter of our heart. The clean becomes unclean because we have improper motivation. Our consciences cannot be clean before God because our hearts are not clean before God and we must get this part of it right.

All the judgmentalism, all of the unwelcoming attitudes, all of those things would just dissipate if our hearts were right about these unclear issues in the scriptures.

So here's the exhortation, verse 13. Therefore, therefore, retaining back to the previous verses, verses 10 through 12, it talks about God's ultimate and final judgment.

So in light of that, knowing that God is the final and ultimate judge, 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.

Now it's important to know here that the stumbling block he's referring to is not the same way in which Christ is referred to the stumbling block for Israel. So know that is the case.

[ 12 : 21 ] That's not the same thing he's talking about here. In fact, instead, he's talking about, the Greek here is *apollomai*. Right?

Excuse me. I'm going to back up just a little bit. The idea of the stumbling block is the idea of tripping over something. A hindrance would be something like a fence that would have been used in that way. Something that would have kept the brother from progressing in spiritual nature.

Right? That would prevent their well-being. This is what the stumbling block or hindrance is that he's referring to. We see again in verse 20, the last half in verse 21. It is wrong for anyone to make another brother stumble by what he eats.

It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. 1 Corinthians 8-9 says, But take care that this right of yours, your liberty, does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

Right? So the exhortation is, do not do something that causes a weaker brother to stumble into sin. The weaker brother who has decided that their conscience is not clean before God for doing something.

[ 13 : 27 ] They've decided that they ought not to. And yet by the way we practice our liberty, we draw them into it. We cause them to stumble in that way. We cause, we weaken their faith in that way.

And Paul gives in the text for this exhortation at least four reasons why we shouldn't. Past judgment. Why we should decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Firstly, because it destroys the one for whom Christ died. We see this in verse 15. Alright? And here's our Greek word, *apollomai*. *Apollomai*.

It means devastation. The Greek squalor W.E. Vines explains, the idea is not extinction, but ruin, loss. Not of being, but of well-being.

It destroys the well-being, the spiritual well-being of the weaker brother. Matthew 18, 14. Jesus says, So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

[ 14 : 32 ] That's the parable of the lost sheep. Right? He's not talking about those who are not already saved. He's talking about those who are. The sheep. And when one goes astray, we go and we search it out and we bring it back in because we don't want it to perish.

Apollonai. To not be of good being spiritually. That's what he's referring to. Those of you familiar with the Pilgrim's Progress, there's a famous character in the book named Apollyon.

This is where Bunyan got this name for him. We understand him to be the devil. And what does he do with Christian? He fights with Christian to bring him back into his kingdom.

But Christian is secure. Christian is secure because of what the Lord of the kingdom he's walking in has done for him. What Christ has done for him. And he's given him the tools to fight off Apollyon. Right? That his walk would not be devastated. It's a fun connection for you to the other night when we read that together. That's the Greek word that that name Apollyon comes from in the Pilgrim's Progress.

[15:39] So we ought not judge. We ought to decide not to put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the way of our brother because it destroys the one for whom Christ died. Do you feel the weight of that? That as you practice your liberty as you say I've been set free to do this or dress this way partake of this thing that if you don't do so carefully you will cause your brother to be weak.

You will cause your brother to strain spiritually. That is antithesis of love. Right? That's the opposite of what we're being called to do.

To walk as children of light. To walk in love the end of chapter 13. It's the opposite of that. We ought to be seeking each other's mutual upbuilding as he says later here in the chapter.

The second reason is because not passing judgment not putting the stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother is acceptable to God and it is approved by men.

It's verse 16 through 18. 1 Corinthians 9 19 says For though I am free from all I have made myself a servant to all that I might win more of them.

[16:55] Martin Luther once said a Christian man is the most free Lord of all and subject to none. And at the same time he said the next sentence a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all and subject to everyone.

So serving Christ in this way not passing judgment being sure that we walk carefully in our liberty it's acceptable to God and it's approved by men.

He says to us to not let anybody call something that we find clean, good, acceptable, evil. He's talking about generally about mankind don't let people look at you and say he practices evil.

Be very careful how you walk. Something might be permissible to you but it's not always beneficial. is it? Thirdly not passing the judgment not putting stumbling block or hindrance in the way of our brothers pursues the work of God.

Verse 19 through the first half of 20 let's read that together so then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God.

[18:16] We can look previously in verse 18 excuse me verse 17 the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy. so it pursues the work of God to live in this way namely it pursues righteousness and peace and joy.

Ephesians 4 3 says that we are to be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. 1 Corinthians 8 12 and 13 reads thus sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak you sin against Christ therefore if food makes my brother stumble I will never eat meat lest I make my brother stumble.

I mentioned this last week what was happening at this time that there were some meats that the Jews found impermissible according to old Mosaic law and for the Gentiles meats that were offered to idols they saw as dirty.

So many of the weak brethren wouldn't partake of these meats. In fact as we see in the beginning of verse 14 some of them became vegetarians because they so wanted to avoid these meats and Paul here says in 1 Corinthians that he himself would become a vegetarian in order to be sure that he didn't put a stumbling block in the way of his brothers.

Do we orient our lives like that? Everything we do seeking the good of those who are part of the family. So it pursues the work of God this building up of righteousness and peace and joy it brings to earth the kingdom of heaven.

[19:58] Fourthly it promotes a clean conscience which leads to joy. Verse 22 and 23 the faith that you have keep between yourself and God blessed or happy or joyful is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves 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.

So 22a the first part of that is aimed at the stronger brother. The faith that you have keep it between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

If you have the faith to believe the gospel to the degree that you have liberty and you practice it or don't you can also in your liberty not do things keep that between yourself and God don't make issues out of non-issues.

We're so apt to do this because we will be blessed we will have joy if we're clean we have clean consciousness before God for what we approve.

The same applies the joy that's at stake here to the weaker brother. Notice verse 23 we get this segue the last half of 22 into 23 23 says but whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats because his faith doesn't permit it.

[ 21 : 30 ] He doesn't believe that what he's allowed to do he's doing. Because the eating is not from faith for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

And this is often used the little ending here of verse 23 to recognize that what is good and what is bad what is permissible and impermissible is a matter of faith.

How is it that God is leading us? So me wearing a tie because I feel that God wants me to wear a tie on this Sunday morning proceeds from faith and therefore it's good for me to do this very thing. If I wore this tie simply to please men it wouldn't be from faith and it would be sin. If you have decided to abstain from alcohol and yet you feel this pressure to practice your liberty as some people we know do and therefore you drink just because you just want to prove I'm set free in Christ I'm allowed it's okay but it doesn't proceed from faith from an earnest searching out of God's will for your life sin.

It's a strong exhortation to the weaker brother. 1 Timothy 1.19 Paul writes we are to hold faith and a good conscience by rejecting this some have made shipwreck of their faith.

[ 23 : 01 ] We're to hold to that we're to search out before God I so wish sometimes that the Bible just had a simple to do list like the appendix A right we could just flip to the back and there would be a don't do and a do list that sums up for us everything instructed to us and that it goes beyond even what the scriptures go beyond just so I can be sure right tie on Sunday got it right no tie the rest of the day the rest of the weeks okay I'm good right don't you wish we could just do that sometimes just have a new law handed down to us right just make it a little bit simpler do you ever ask why that hasn't happened for us why is it that we're given very specific parameters about some things and not others if treated properly it draws us to God he wants to know you and to be known by you if I had a list of rules would I ever implore God for his will for my life no I had to follow the list of rules right in that way our savior could have been a pink bunny rabbit that comes to the earth hands us a list of rules and says do this and you will be saved right that's not what we've been called to in

Christ we've been called to a relationship we've been called brothers we are his adopted children now right and as such we've been given latitude in some things we're meant to come close to him to know how it is we're meant to walk out our faith what is it that my love looks like right day to day moment by moment as I said I find this teaching rather simple I don't think there's a terrible amount of complexity to it but putting it into action in our lives can be horribly complex but that complexity causes us to depend on him for those answers to recognize that we're regenerate we are new creations and therefore we have the spirit of God abiding in us to direct our every step what is permissible what is impermissible right it's a matter of conscience ask that God would work in you the proper form of this love that you might not cast judgment that you might seek to not put a stumbling block or a hindrance and walk your faith out see how it plays out so I ask again what do our actions say about our hearts particularly regarding our liberty what do they say about our faith do our actions say that our hearts are resting in God as our portion as our completion right our sufficiency our satisfaction our treasure is that what our actions say as we practice liberty together or does it say something entirely different does it say that our

God is now our liberty that we have in Christ Hebrews 3 12 through 14 says take care brothers lest there be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God but exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin for we have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end so you see that we're meant to work together on this type of stuff right not to let these little issues the non-issues that we make issues become a dividing thing amongst us but to exhort one another to see that the way we live matters and to walk these things out not to let the

deceitfulness of sin creep in even as we do things that are scripturally permissible but by the way we do them have become impermissible we're meant to press each other into the truth that we might have confidence firm to the end let's pray together turn  
Thank you.