

I'm A Better Christian Than You!
Rom 14:1-12

To this day I can't believe what I witnessed in another church many years ago. It was a Wednesday evening and one of our new members comes in for Bible study. Nice shirt and nice dress shorts. Suddenly two of our older ladies pull him aside and talk to him very earnestly. At the end of the Bible study we had a devotional and offered an invitation and this new Christian came forward to repent. What he repented of blew my mind. Our two sisters had convinced this young man that he had committed a cardinal sin by coming to bible study in shorts! Can you believe that? The sin of wearing dress shorts?

At another congregation, the church sang a song during the collection like we do. Afterwards, a man from another church asked to meet with the elders and then rebuked them for mixing acts of worship. He told them that God would not have accepted that worship service because of the sinful behavior in it of giving and singing at the same time.

I could give you many more examples, but you get the picture. My question is; were these clear-cut sin issues or did people pass judgment on disputable matters? As we dig into this part of Romans, let's see if we find an answer.

PRAYER

I. Disputable matters

A. This passage doesn't say don't judge

1. In 2008 Casey Anthony's daughter went missing for a month. It took Casey that long to file a missing person's report because she was busy with a very messed up life. She was charged with murder, went to trial and was found not guilty. One of the jurors who says she was a Christian

and couldn't vote for the death penalty for Casey Anthony because she said she didn't feel right judging someone else.

2. America has continued to develop into a non-judgmental society.
3. In our societal thinking today, what one person chooses to do is that person's choice and I have no right to say they are right or wrong.
4. We will almost excuse anyone of anything in order to not be seen as "judgey"
5. In the church setting we say almost the same thing.
 - a) It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe in Jesus.
 - b) I don't have a right to say your beliefs are right or wrong.
6. That all sounds really good on the surface.
7. As Rodney King famously said, "Can't we just all get along?"
8. But that isn't what the Bible teaches. Paul makes that distinction here in Romans.
9. I think we need to make sure and understand what this passage is and is not saying.
10. It doesn't say "don't judge".
11. Paul hinges everything on "disputable matters"
12. By that very terminology, it means there are some things that are indisputable and must be judged according to God's mandates.

B. What's a disputable matter?

1. A disputable matter is anything that people argue over, but you can't prove right or wrong from Biblical teachings.
2. In Romans it was eating meat.
 - a) Doesn't really sound like an issue that matters does it.
 - b) Who cares if a person is a vegetarian or meat eater?
3. It wasn't a matter of the meat, but where the meat was bought.

4. The meat that was most readily available and cheapest was found in the many temples around the area.
5. This meat had been sacrificed to some god before it was sold at the temple market.
6. Many of these Roman Christians had been converted from paganism and really struggled with anything attached to the idol worship they had just left.
7. Eating meat was the same as worshiping the god it was sacrificed to in their minds.
8. Then the Jewish Christians wanted to keep the Sabbath too.
9. If you understand this passage, you realize that Paul was dealing with the hottest topic issues of his time!
10. In both cases, they were making a salvation issues out of something that God had not.

C. Indisputable matters

1. In several passages of the New Testament, we are told to oppose false teachers and sin
2. If you look at many of the letters written in the New Testament, great chunks of them are dedicated to opposing false teacher and their ideas.
3. Scripture after scripture reminds us that we cannot accept willful sin in our own lives or in the church.
4. So, we are to judge, but IN THE RIGHT CONTEXT AND IN THE RIGHT WAY!

II. The Weak and the Strong

A. Interesting definitions

1. It has amazeS me that everyone feels they are the strong mature Christian in a religious debate.
2. They are the one with the right answer and the other guy is simply a weak Christian who simply doesn't know their Bible well enough.
3. But they make their argument as the weaker brother would make it. They argue from the struggling side rather than the confident side.

4. I received an email from a brother some time ago who was convinced he understood exactly what a certain biblical doctrine was all about, and I was teaching it falsely. I obviously didn't understand it well enough and it was his obligation to set me straight.

5. I saw his view as very distorted and missing the whole point of that doctrine.

6. We both considered ourselves the strong, mature one!

7. At another time, I was told by someone that I was causing him and his wife to stumble by greeting the church and they respond. He said his wife was speaking during worship and I forced to say hello through pressure. He was one of our elders at that church.

8. I was a young man and he was the Elder, but his argument from this passage was he was the immature Christian and I was the mature one.

9. Do you see the issue?

10. What I have learned over my years of ministry is that almost always isn't about weaker and stronger, it's about my preference.

11. But we go to passages like Romans 14 to make our preference sound more scriptural.

12. We often mistake our belief as a salvation issue.

B. Actions of the strong brother or sister

1. So, how does the mature Christian respond to the weaker one?

2. Christians today have totally forgotten to practice verse 3 Romans 14:3 (ESV) — 3 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.

3. I've seen it played out lately in the church magazines.

a) One group treats the other like a little child who simply doesn't get it yet. Their writings show a smugness that would make most people want to smack them.

b) On the other side are a group of writers that are so mean spirited and condemning, that you reject them out of hand for their terrible attitude.

4. If you want peace within a church, just practice these two simple commands!

a) Don't look down on people who see things differently than you.

b) Don't judge someone as sinfully wrong because they don't hold the same belief as you on non-salvation issues.

5. You would be amazed at what it does for church unity.

6. If you want unity, make sure you care about the people around you more than your personal preferences.

C. Why should we do these things?

1. Verses 6-8 tells us why we should practice these principles. Romans 14:6-8 (NLT) — 6 Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God. 7 For we don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves. 8 If we live, it's to honor the Lord.

And if we die, it's to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

2. Both groups are really trying to do right by God.
3. Beyond that, we are all part of one church and one Lord.
4. So often we want to paint someone who disagrees with us on a biblical issue as trying to pervert the gospel.
5. The reality is that is very rarely true.
6. Most are very honest in their love for God.
7. They want to do the right thing, and believe with all their hearts that they are.
8. The key to growing stronger is to be honest with ourselves.
9. I should never believe something only because my church says that's the way it is.
10. I need to study scripture and find God's will, not my will or my church's will.
11. In the end, your church won't be there at your side on judgment day, your preacher won't be there to say, "well, this person was just following my teachings."
12. Listen to verses 10-12. Romans 14:10–12 (ESV) — 10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; 11 for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue

shall confess to God.” 12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

III. Causing to Stumble

A. What is stumbling?

1. I want to briefly finish by looking at the last 10 verses.
2. Today I am just going to summarize, but I want to encourage you to dig deeper into this passage for personal study.
3. It keys around vs. 13 - Romans 14:13 (ESV) — 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.
4. This isn't about offending someone.
5. It's not about your view or my view about a subject.
6. It's about causing someone to sin.
7. If my eating meat, would cause someone to slide back into Idolatry, I need to forgo eating meat from the temples.
8. Paul makes it very clear in vs 14 that the meat is fine with God.
9. Yet some of the new believers weren't at that point of maturity yet, so don't go shopping at the temple for your meat and help them grow stronger and realize that idols are not gods.
10. Teach them that the meat is simply meat, because we understand we aren't worshipping the idol they were sacrificed to.
11. Love your fellow Christians enough that you don't accidentally set the stage for them to sin.

B. Modern example

1. Paul uses another analogy that still pertains to us today.
2. In vs. 20-22 he addresses another sticky area, wine.
3. Notice again he says it's all clean, but some of your brothers and sisters struggle with it as a sin.
4. It might be that they over use it, or they see it as worldly and not Christian.

5. So, what does Paul say to do?

a) Keep it between yourself and God.

b) Buy your wine where they won't see you, and drink it where they won't see you.

6. Paul says in I Cor 10:23 - 1 Corinthians 10:23 (ESV) — 23 “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up.

7. I think that is still good advice for today as many Christians still struggle with the stigma of alcohol as a sin for them.

C. Final thoughts

1. Our job is to love and grow in our faith, not to judge and condemn where God doesn't judge and condemn

2. If we think we are the judge, expect to give an account for yourself to the real judge.

3. Love your fellow Christian enough to protect their souls by not doing things with them or in front of them that would cause them to sin, even though you have the right to participate!

4. It's not a sin for you, you're fine.

5. But it could be for the person sitting next to you.