

117. The Book of Romans 14:14-23

Paul's Epistle to the Romans
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

(3-18-26)

Find this week's Study Audio & Video [Here](#)

This evening in our study in Romans we are in chapter 14 where Paul is dealing with division in the church in Rome—division that was due to legalism. (Comment)

Romans 14:10–13 (NKJV)

¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 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 shall give account of himself to God. ¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

After Cain killed his brother Abel and God eventually questioned him about where his brother Abel was—Cain derisively responded, *“Am I my brother's keeper?”*

Paul is essentially saying, *“Yes as Christians we are our brothers and sisters' keepers”* in the sense that we are to watch out for one another and help younger believers grow in their faith and not flaunt our liberty in Christ so as to cause them to stumble in their walk with the Lord.

Again, the issue that Paul continues to focus on in this chapter is the eating of certain foods. The church in Rome was made up of Jewish and Gentile believers—both having been brought up in very different cultures.

Gentiles ate pretty much anything, but the Jewish people had been given very strict dietary restrictions by God—but now in Christ they all belonged to the family of God—members of one Body in Jesus. That led to an inevitable *clash of cultures* which would require love, humility and the dying to self on each person's part to maintain unity.

Romans 14:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*

When Paul says here **“that there is nothing unclean of itself”**, he is only talking about animals used for food.

One author—

“There are plenty of things in life that are unclean, such as pornographic literature, suggestive jokes, dirty movies, and every form of immorality. Paul's statement must be understood in the light of the context. Christians do not contact ceremonial defilement by eating foods which the Law of Moses branded unclean.”

This issue with eating certain foods isn't the food itself, but the conscience of the person eating that food.

Under the New Covenant God declared all foods 'clean' and edible—

1 Timothy 4:1–5 (NKJV)

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

⁴ For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

One commentator—

“It is sanctified by the word in the sense that the Bible distinctly sets it apart as being good. It is sanctified by prayer when we ask God to bless it for His glory and for the strengthening of our bodies in His service. But if a weak brother thinks it is wrong for him to eat pork, for example, then it is wrong. To eat it would be to violate his God-given conscience.”

Jesus said, *“It’s not what goes into a man’s mouth that defiles him, but what comes out of his mouth...because it comes from his heart.”* (Matthew 15:11)

But that didn’t stop people back then and even today from thinking that maintaining a certain diet makes them more spiritual and more righteous than the person who doesn’t eat as they do. If Paul was around today, he’d probably put it this way—*“Eating only salads doesn’t make you more spiritual than those who have a Big Mac or a hot fudge Sunday once in a while.”*

Of course, the big problem with this kind of spiritual legalism is, as one author put it,

“We often think that if we sacrifice something for God (such as the right to marry or to eat certain foods), then He owes us something. This is legalism at its worst, trying to manipulate God into giving us something. The idea is that we can make God indebted to us, make Him our servant and make ourselves His master. In this we fulfill the original doctrine of demons - that we should be gods”.

Romans 14:14–15a (NKJV)

¹⁴ I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean. ¹⁵ **Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love...**

Paul is saying, *“If you as a Gentile Christian invite a brand-new Jewish convert to Christianity over for dinner and serve pork chops—that would be very insensitive and unloving.”*

➤ *“Well, he needs to grow up and realize he’s not under the Law of Moses anymore! I’m doing him a favor!”*

“No”, Paul is saying, “you’re causing him to stumble because his faith isn’t mature enough yet to realize that. He still doesn’t think it’s right to eat pork (which God prohibited in the Law)—but because he doesn’t want to be rude as your guest he’ll probably go ahead and eat what you’re serving, but his conscience will cause him to believe he is sinning against God—that is not walking in love toward your brother!”

Matthew 18:5–6 (NLT)

[Jesus said] ⁵ “And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me.

⁶ But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

As one pastor put it—*“If Jesus was willing to give up His life for the sake of that brother—can’t I at least give up my pork chops?!”*

Romans 14:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your* food, you are no longer walking in love. **Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.**

The word **‘destroy’** in the Greek doesn’t mean *‘destroy him in hell’*, but to *“seriously devastate his spiritual growth.”* Our greatest goal as Christians should be, not to flaunt our liberty but to do all we can to edify, encourage and serve each other.

This kind of legalism is still around today:

- **“Food”**—*“God want us all on the ‘Ezekiel Diet’—no meat!”*
- **“Drink”**—*“Coffee is ‘Christian crack’—it’s a drug and therefore it’s sin to drink it!”*

The same goes for having a glass of wine with dinner.

➤ *“Pastor, is it OK for me to have a glass of wine once in a while with dinner?”* You ask Jesus if it’s okay.

I personally don’t drink any alcohol—but having a glass of wine or a beer once in a while—that’s between you and the Lord.

Many in the Church today believe that God commands Christians to observe the Sabbath—and they look down on and even condemn those that don’t observe it.

Colossians 2:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths,

Romans 14:5 (NKJV)

⁵ One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

The Christian is not under such rules and regulations concerning *days* and *diets*.

Now just because Paul says **“let no man judge you”** doesn’t mean we shouldn’t let the Holy Spirit judge our hearts whether or not it’s OK to do something, eat or drink something, or go somewhere. One of the main problems with those who are legalists is that they’re always condemning everyone who doesn’t measure up to their standards or keep the rules as they see it.

Man condemns but God convicts.

Romans 14:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ **Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;**

In other words, Paul is saying, *“Your freedom in Christ is good but don’t misuse it lest others call your ‘good’ (‘using your freedom in Christ’)—evil.”* (‘causing someone to stumble in their faith’)

Romans 14:16–18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ **for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.** ¹⁸ **For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.**

It's normal for Christians to disagree on non-essential doctrines and whether or not certain practices are legitimate or not (celebrating Christmas with a tree and Santa Clause; or taking the kids trick or treating on Halloween)—or like in Paul's day, whether or not eating certain foods was okay or was observing certain days better for worshiping the Lord or not.

But when the disagreement becomes so rancorous that they cancel each other over it—that's no longer a normal disagreement—it's a serious problem.

As we have already talked about—one of the issues the Christians in Rome were dividing over was whether or not it was morally acceptable to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols—was it a sin or not. The argument had gotten so heated and acrimonious that they were accusing each other of not being real Christians if they ate or didn't eat certain foods —

One pastor said,

"The hot issues of Paul's day (eating and drinking or not eating and drinking) did not touch the real issues. Was it right to eat or wrong to eat? The answer could be "yes" or "no." One said, "You can eat and still be of the kingdom of God." Another said, "If you eat you are not of the kingdom of God." Paul responded, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink. Don't make externals like food be the criteria that you base your fellowship with one another on. The real issue is have they entered into a life of righteousness, peace and joy through the Holy Spirit by receiving Jesus as their Savior? That's the real basis for fellowship—not what's in your stomach but what is in your heart!"

Romans 14:19–20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ **Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.** ²⁰ **Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.**

Here's an extremely important principle that legalists miss in their preoccupation with externals—we can do the right things out of the wrong motives and wind up turning what's good into something bad or "evil".

So often in the Church, Christians are so focused on *outward* actions they forget that God is more concerned with the *inward* attitudes of the heart.

Romans 14:21–23 (NKJV)

²¹ **It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.** ²² **Do you have faith** [that eating meat sacrificed to an idol isn't sin]? **Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.** ²³ **But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.**

The real issue often isn't the action itself (morally neutral actions), but what motivated the action.

The Christians in Rome were up in arms about the actions of eating or not eating certain foods—but all the while God was looking at the motives of each person's heart in why they were eating or not eating.

When it comes to morally neutral behavior—the behavior isn't the issue, but the attitude behind the behavior.

As we've already seen, Paul opened up this chapter by addressing this issue:

Romans 14:1–6 (NLT)

¹ Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. ² For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. ³ Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord's help, they will stand and receive his approval. ⁵ In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. 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.

The bottom line—when it comes to morally neutral issues Paul is saying—“*Let your conscience be your guide*”—

Romans 14:23 (NLT)

²³ But if you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it. For you are not following your convictions [conscience]. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.

The real issue in the eyes of God isn't whether or not an action is a sin (again only talking about morally neutral actions and behaviors), but whether or not a person believes it's right or wrong to do it—again focusing on the heart.

If they *think* it's a sin and they do it—in the eyes of God it is a sin!

Paul dealt with this extensively in his first epistle to the Corinthians—

1 Corinthians 10:23–28, 31–33 (NKJV)

²³ All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's *well-being*. ²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; ²⁶ for “*the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness.*” ²⁷ If any of those who do not believe invites you *to dinner*, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. ²⁸ But if anyone says to you, “This was offered to idols,” do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for “*the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness.*”...
³¹ Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved.

Pastor Chuck Smith—

“I feel really sorry for these people who feel that they've got the corner on the truth and if you don't believe the way we believe, you're in trouble! God, help those poor guys. Their position on the five points of Calvinism, taking them to extreme, gives no place for evangelism, because if a person isn't elected to be saved, all of the persuasion of the Scriptures in the world aren't going to bring him to faith in Jesus Christ. And there is no choice. The fact is they showed up at Greg's campaign (Evangelist Greg Laurie) in Sacramento with tee-shirts that had the word, “Choice” in a circle and then a cross through it, “No Choice.” And they were telling the people, coming to an evangelistic service, you have no right being here. You can't choose to accept Jesus. He's wrong in telling

you to come forward to accept Jesus, because unless you are elected you can't come. And carrying that to an extreme. So because you can't convert a sinner, what you try and do, is convert the Christian to your weird position. There's no one else to convert, you feel like you have to convert someone. You can't convert them to be saved, so convert them to belief in the tulip, the five points of Calvinism. Sad! And thus they are constantly attacking. Attacking. Attacking. They are attack sheep. Jesus said you're sheep. They are the attack sheep. They are snarling. Sic em! Can you imagine a sheep, snarling and attacking? Oh help us. The kingdom of God is not meat or drink. It's not the differences. It's righteousness. It's peace. It's joy. It's walking in love."

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Want to know more? Click [here](#).

Catch this week's audio, video, study and sermon notes [HERE](#).