

Romans: A Warning Against Judging Brothers

Romans 14:1-12

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 14. If you came in and did not pick up an outline and you want you, you still have an opportunity to pick one up and some of the entrances. If you don't have one, you may want to let someone who is on the end of the row go out and pick up a handful if you want to follow along with the outline. We are working our way through a marvelous section of the book of Romans in which Paul is speaking about the Christian way of life.

You could really call Romans 12 and 13, God's righteousness in everyday life. Now, he is continuing on in much the same vein as Romans chapter 14 and in chapter 15 down to the thirteenth verse. Although, the focus there seems to be more on life in the body of Christ. Do you remember in Romans 12, he talked to us about our relationship to the world; he talked about our relationship to one another as believers. In Romans 13, he talked about our relationship with the government. He also came back to talking about our relationship with those outside the walls of the church and our loving them as neighbors. That was the focus, as we look at Romans 13, verses 11 through 14.

Here in Romans 14, he will especially address particular situations in the life of the local congregation which test our living up to our profession of faith, and it's relevant to every local congregation of Christians. In the passage tonight, for instance, he is going to talk about how you deal with differences that are exhibited amongst believers in the local congregation. Differences of opinion about moral and ethical and religious matters that are of great significance to the individuals who hold those opinions. How do you deal with that within the local body? Paul is going to address that here. This whole section of Romans treats of life in the body of Christ.

Now, we are going to look at verses 1 through 12 tonight. This is not only a fairly large chunk to take up in one message; we have been taking a little bit less than that. It is also a very important and yet difficult passage in the book of Romans. What we are going to do is take it up in two consecutive sermons, looking to try and deal with some contemporary applications of the principles. The first

message will be fairly heavy Bible study as we try and make sure we understand the main outlines of the passage clearly in our mind so that we can then take the next step of asking, "Ok, how does this speak to specific issues that we relate too?" I think that if we jump to that second thing before dealing with the first matter here in Romans 14, verses 1 through 12, we are still going to be left foggy on the principles.

It is the principles that Paul wants to get across to us. That is very important here. I'll make this comment again in the message, that Paul, in the face of specific situations refused to come up with a list of rules on how to deal with the situation. Well, in this situation do this, in that situation do that; rather, he will give principles that are always to be observed. Then he asks Christians to think Christianly about those principles in specific situations. The wisdom of that is manifold because you can never come up with a comprehensive rule to deal with every particular situation in life. So you have to have some basic principles that are able to be applied in multiple circumstances. That's what Paul does here in Romans 14. With that as a word of introduction, let's look at Romans 14 beginning in verse 1.

Now, accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord does not eat and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. Amen this is God's word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord, as we contemplate the truth of Your word, clarify our minds and rule our hearts we pray. Rein us in by the truth of Your word and by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and enable us to live in accordance with these principles that you have set forth in Your most holy Scripture. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

How are Christians who are more mature to get along with Christians who are

less mature in the faith in areas in which there are differences or questions, or scruples, or opinions about matters religious or spiritual, or ethical? How is life in the body to go on when there are differences in these areas; not differences over the gospel, not differences over fundamental matters of faith. The Apostle Paul is clear in all his writings on that. There is to be no flexibility with regard to the gospel. There is to be no flexibility with regard to the fundamental teachings of the faith. The Christian is to zealously hold to them and is to tolerate any variation within the body about those basic commitments. What about other types of spiritual and religious and ethical differences or scruples regarding various matters that come up in the life of the church?

Paul is addressing precisely that question tonight. I'd like to look at three parts of this passage in Romans 14 verses 1 — 12. The first part has to do with food and a particular issue that has come up in regard to the eating of meat. The second section has to do again, mentioning the issue of food, but adds to it the observance of specific days. The third section has to do with the general principle of judging one another.

I. Mutual forbearance in the body of Christ.

Verses 1 through 4 give us a call for mutual forbearance in the body of Christ. Forbear with one another. Paul gives us the specific example of differing views on meat within the congregation in Rome. Perhaps this is an example that is even broader than the church there in Rome, but is repeating itself in various Christian churches with whom Paul has some experience. Paul says here in verse 1 through 4, that because God himself is the master of all His children, His children are not to stand over one another in judgment in spiritual scruples. Let's walk through this passage and see several points that Paul makes. Look at verse 1. Here Paul instructs strong Christians to welcome weaker Christians, but not to quarrel with them about their particular issues or scruples, except the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.

This immediately raises two questions in your mind. We will only answer those partially this week. We will come back to them the next time. The first question that comes to your mind is, "Just who exactly are the ones who are weak in faith?" Who is in this class of Christians that Paul is speaking about. Well, probably they are Jewish Christians or a subset of Jewish Christians who are struggling with some of the new freedoms of the gospel. They are having a hard time taking it in that they no longer have to do certain things that they were accustomed to doing as part of their faithful religious performance, now that they are believers in Jesus who is the Messiah. We will work through that next time.

In this passage, it is very clear that the ones who are weak in faith are the ones who are refusing to eat the meat. That should give great comfort to those of you who are vegetarians tonight. The ones who are weak in faith are the ones who

are articulating a position against the usage of meat. That's what we are facing in this passage. The weak, the ones who are weak in faith are probably Jewish Christians struggling with new freedoms of the gospel.

Secondly, we have to ask this question: "What are the opinions that are being referenced here?" Paul calls on us not to pass judgment on their opinions. Are these opinions related to Paul's teaching on justification? For instance, is Paul saying, you may have some in the congregation who believe what I teach about justification by faith, and you have others who believe in justification by faith and works — don't pass judgment on them. Do you think that is what Paul is saying? If it is, he certainly has changed his tune from the book of Galatians. Paul again was not about to tolerate divergence on that particular teaching because he saw it fundamental to the Christian embrace of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, Paul's references here are not to divergences from the gospel, but to what we might call things indifferent, things that are not commanded or spoken in the word of God. Paul in this verse is calling on us to welcome a brother in and to let him know our esteem and love for him and not to just pick on his doubtful points. Issues are perhaps side issues in the greater scheme of things, but very significant to him. Paul is calling for a magnanimous attitude on the part of stronger brothers in dealing with weaker brothers.

Look at verse 2 then. Paul goes on to describe two groups in this passage. One is meat eating and the other is vegetarian. If we take his words literally, one person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak, and eats vegetables only. Again, aren't you glad it's the weaker brother is the one who eats only vegetables, I certainly am. You can tell from my physique. At any rate, this may not simply be speaking to abstinence from meat, period, but this may well be referring to abstinence from meat offered to idols. If this passage is dealing with the same kind of subject that say, I Corinthians 8 is dealing with, then that is the case. Paul doesn't give us enough of a clue to be absolutely sure.

Paul goes on to say, if you look at verse 3, that the ones who are eating this meat should not hold those brothers who are abstaining from meat in contempt, and that those who are not partaking of the meat should not despise those who are partaking of the meat. They are both free to do their conscience in this area, Paul says, because God has accepted them.

I want you to understand that in verse 3 that Paul's major concern here is that those who are abstaining from the meat, do not pass judgment on those who are partaking of the meat. In this case, he is concerned that the weaker brother, to use his phrase from verse 1, not become the Lord of the conscience of the stronger brothers. Paul is concerned here that the fellowship not be held hostage by the scruples of those who are weaker brethren.

Look again then at verse 4. Paul then brings in a thunderous principle: God is our master and so we don't have a right to pass judgment on His servants. Look at

verse 4, "Who are you to judge the servant of another. To his own master he stands or falls, and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."

Now I will come back to that principle in just a moment, but even reading this, a couple of questions come to mind. The first question is this, "What does it mean to judge the servant of another?" Following that, another questions, "Does this rule out all judgment or discretion or discrimination?" Are we to cease making judgments whatsoever about fellow believers? Well, the answer of course is no. Paul is not asking for that type of a sweeping restriction on the exercise of our judgment. Paul himself is ready to judge in the body. For instance, he has judged on group to be stronger brethren and one group to be weaker brethren. That's a judgment. So, Paul is not calling on us not to make any kind of estimation about one another.

He is, however, asking for us to restrain ourselves in matters that are indifferent. To refrain from judging one another in those areas. Now we are going to have to expand on that next week. That's why I said we'd walk through the passage this week, deal with the principle. Then we will try to get down into the nitty gritty and the practice. That is where the difficulty comes in the details.

Let's go back to this big principle in verse 4. Paul says, "God is our master." He's telling us to accept one another in these areas of secondary opinion, to do so in light of a tremendous truth: That is God is master, God is judge because He is the master of His children. We should not be too quick to take upon ourselves the role of judge and master. We should refrain from it. We should be ready to give as much room as we possibly can to the consciences of our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a tremendous principle that he sets down. There is the first thing that he says in this passage. God is our master and therefore we need to remember that as we estimate, as we exercise discretion as we practice judgment with regard to those in the body of Christ.

II. Mutual forbearance because what we do we do for the Lord.

The second thing I want you to see is this, if you'd look at verses 5 through 9. Paul here calls us to mutual forbearance in the body of Christ because we do what we do for the Lord and we belong to the Lord. Paul wants us to remember that our relating is controlled by this particular truth: That we do everything that we do for the Lord. We do it as unto the Lord. We belong to the Lord and because we live for God and because we belong to Him. His children are not to stand over one another in judgment, in spiritual scruples, because we live for God. And because we belong to him, we are not to stand over one another in these matter of spiritual scruples.

Look again at verse 5, as Paul moves on to a second illustration. He started with this issue of meat or no meat, meat or vegetables, or meat offered to idols or

meat not offered to idols, whatever the particular case is. Now he brings in another illustration. This illustration regards the observance or the estimation of days. One person, he says, esteems one day above others while another person treats all alike. Both, he says, should be fully convinced in their own minds. Again, two comments we make in passage and we will come back to it next time. Paul, in this passage, is not talking about a difference of the status of the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's day, or Sunday. I'll explain why he's not doing that when we come back next week together.

So we have to ask the question, "What is going on here?" What is he talking about, one honoring or esteeming or valuing or treating one day differently and others treating all days alike. Again, this probably has to do with the Jewish Christians and the observance of certain holy days within the calendar of the covenant people, and so I will speak to that directly when we come back.

Paul goes on in verse 6 to say, if you observe the day, do so for the Lord and not with your eye primarily on others. So also one ought either to eat meat or not eat meat with thankfulness to God. He is wanting to focus us on what our heart motivation is for doing whatever it is we do. For observing the day or not observing the day. What is our heart motivation? Do it for the Lord, Paul says in verse 6.

Then in verses 7 and 8, Paul articulates the second huge principle in this passage. The first principle he wanted to bring to bare was this. You are not your fellow Christians master. God is their master, it's not your job to be the Lord of their conscience, it's not your job to be the thought police, it's not your job to sort them out on every single that they may have theologically. God is their master. The second major principle however, that he begins to articulate here in verse 7, is that no Christians lives or dies to, or for himself; we serve a higher master. Rather, he says in verse 8, we all live and die to the Lord. We are His whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. We live for the Lord, we belong to the Lord, we have been united to the Lord, and in light of that grand reality we ought to treat one another with forbearance and magnanimity. Jim Phillips says, "It's only when we are captive to God's word and God's will that we attain real freedom."

Notice that in addressing the differences, one group that wants to observe a day, another group that doesn't; one group that eats meat, one group that abstains, Paul refuses to say, in this situation, "Here is the answer. Eat meat without misgiving, or don't eat meat at all, or observe that day, or don't observe that day." That's not the answer that he gives. The answer that he gives is, "No Christian lives for himself. Whether he lives or he dies, he belongs to the Lord." He refuses to set up a specific rule to solve the issue. He appeals to this general principle. He longs for the Christian to be captive to God's word and to God's will and he presses home this great principle of God's ownership of us. We belong to Him, we live for Him and what ever we do, whether we live or we die, we do for the Lord because we are the Lord's.

In fact, he goes on to say in verse 9 that it was for this very purpose that Christ died and rose. What purpose? That he would be our Lord. He lived, He died, He rose again in order that He might be our Lord. Notice how Paul drives home the point that it's not just that God is our Lord, but it's Christ who is our Lord. Christ is the Lord. Our attitude toward other believers must be governed by the realization that we live for God and that we belong to Him and that Christ is Lord. So, there is the second thing that Paul says in this passage as we deal with these differences. Remember the principle, we live for God, we belong to God. God is our master, we live for God we belong to God.

III. Mutual forbearance because God will judge and we will give account.

Thirdly, if you look at verses 10 through 12, Paul brings this particular argument home by quoting from the Old Testament. He calls us here to a mutual forbearance in the body of Christ because God will judge and we will give an account. Paul is talking about people who have a propensity for judging one another in the body and he says, "Remember it's God who is going to be judging, you are going to give account, so don't be too quick to be in the position of judging here since you will give an account." We will all stand under God's searching judgment, because we will all give an account of ourselves. Paul tells us here that God's children are not to stand over one another in judgment in spiritual scruples. Paul asks a penetrating question in verse 10, "Why are we passing judgment on lesser religious scruples or holding our brethren in contempt since we ourselves will all stand before the judgment seat of God?"

Now, let me come back again with a couple of questions to ask about this great statement. Is this a call to cease and desist from any kind of judgment? Anytime someone makes a judgment on the ethical behavior of a Christian, on the doctrinal position of a Christian, in our day and age you may expect the quotation to be given to him, "Judge not one another lest ye be judged." Our culture doesn't like people making judgments of any type. Is Paul saying, make no judgments at all? Is he calling us here to cease and desist from all exercise of discretion of doctrine and ethics? No, no, he himself is ready to engage in that. The gospels and the epistles of the New Testament constantly cause Christians to be ready to make just those kinds of judgment. What, then, is being forbidden here?

What is Paul telling us not to do? If he is not ruling it all out, where do we draw the line? Where is Paul drawing the line on the exercise of judgment. If it's not an absolute forbidding of making judgments and exercising discretion, where do we draw the line? Well, in this passage it's clear that there is no violation, there is no violation in God's will involved in the discretion that is being exercised. Rather, Paul seems to be calling on us to forbear restrictions of conscience in weaker brethren that they will gradually grow up and grow beyond. At any rate, Paul quotes from the Old Testament to reinforce this truth. He says, "'As I live,' says

the Lord, 'every knee shall bow to Me and every tongue shall give praise to God.'" The point is that God has sworn that all will stand before Him in judgment. Paul is reminding us then that God will judge.

In verse 12, Paul again reiterates that we will give an account of ourselves and so, rather than spending time judging others in these areas, we should be preparing for the general accounting. We may have a tendency to be too quick to judge and so we need to remember that we will be judged.

Now, there is one major thing I want you to see from verses 10 through 13, and that is this: For Paul, the final judgment is a significant factor in our present Christian living. The final judgment is to be a significant part in our thinking and in our behaving. We are not to do anything in this life or in the church without thinking every once in a while about The Great Assize. There will be a day of judgment. This is a very, very significant thing for us to take into account.

Some Christians would say that if we use anything but grace as a motivation to the Christian living we are in danger of falling into works righteousness. I want you to notice that Paul is grounding our motivation in this passage in the apprehension of God's final judgment. Everything is under girded by grace and what the Apostle Paul has said in the book of Romans. That's why he spends so much time on Romans 1 through 11 to drive that point through. That reality of grace, however, does not set aside these other considerations in the Christian life. In this passage Paul says, "Christian, remember God will judge one day, you will give an account one day, so before you pass judgment to quickly remember that on the last day it will not be you on the judgment seat, it will be God and He will cause your weaker brethren to stand." He's already said that in the passage. He's going to cause the weaker brethren to stand so you show then the same kind of generosity in your judgments as does God. Now we will come back and try to work out the hard part of application of that to our own situation when we come back next week. Let's pray.

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