

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Turn your bibles with me to Romans 14

Romans 14 –

We are continuing our verse-by-verse study through this amazing life changing letter that the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – wrote to believers in Rome – and us today about the Gospel of Grace.

For the first 11 chapters – Paul provides for us this amazing doctrine of grace –

Our condition apart from Christ – the problem of sin.

We are all sinners – not because we sin.

We sin because we are sinners.

[Rom 3:23 NKJV] 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

God's one solution to the problem of sin – sending His Son – to live a perfect life and die the death that was reserved for us – out of love.

We play absolutely no part in our salvation – we simply receive it, we embrace it and we live it by faith.

We respond to His grace by presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to Him –

And when we offer our bodies as living sacrifices – God transforms us by renewing our minds –

And so – we stop thinking like the world – because our minds are skewed because of sin to think like the world.

So His work in us – leads to change

We stop thinking that it is all about me – because that is the mind of the world

And we start to think more like Jesus

And pursue God's will

And care about the things that Jesus cared about and love the things that Jesus loves.

And so Paul gives us examples of how this looks –

This is the practical portion of the letter – the application portion.

We serve one another with the gifting that He has given to us

We love without hypocrisy

We love our enemies

We submit to government authority

We put on Jesus

And probably the most difficult for many of us –

How to get along – even when we have difference of opinions, even when we have different convictions – regarding the gray areas – those areas in the bible where we are not given a clear definition of what to do.

And so – this morning, Paul is going to stress to us the importance of unity within the church – remember, we are one in Christ, we are one church, we are one bride, we are one body

and he is going to give us the key to unity in the midst of our diversity.

So – this study is going to be a continuation to last week's study –

And my prayer is that we will be more united

Let's pray...

Read Text –

In our study last week –

Paul provided for us two issues that were bringing division within the church in Rome – two issues that fall into the grey areas.

Whether or not one is allowed to eat meat that is offered up to idols and what day one should worship.

One group walked in liberty and honored God in doing it one way

And one group listened to their conscience and honored God in doing the complete opposite.

Even though there existed a difference of opinion, a difference of conviction in a gray area – Paul says that we are to receive one another – not break fellowship with one another.

Because we have to get along – we have to live with one another – even those that we disagree with.

As one reads the book of Acts –

One of the things that stands out about the early church was that they walked in unity – in one accord

Acts 1:14 - These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication

Acts 2:1 – they were all in one accord

Acts 2:46 - So continuing daily with one accord

Paul wants us to understand that our (the church's) unity is based upon each person's connection to Christ.

So, Paul has already told us to receive one another – we are to have a genuine acceptance of one another

Paul has already told us that we can have a disagreement over nonessentials, personal preferences and disputable manners.

It is ok for me to have my convictions – what is not ok is for me to force my convictions upon other believers or think less of them because they don't have the same convictions that I do. That results in division, isolation.

And the third thing he pointed out at the end of our study was that we will all have to stand before God and give an account to God on how we have treated one another –

It's important we each live in the light of a Spirit-informed conscience – but God cares about our motives – He cares about the heart – did we receive our brethren or reject our brethren.

[Rom 14:13-23 NKJV] 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.

Paul says – that in light of everything he has talked about here in ch 14 –

We need to stop judging each other in the nonessentials –

We must renounce our tendency to camp on the superiority of our personal convictions while seeing those that don't agree as coming up short.

That's what the Carnivores for Christ were doing – those legalist, those vegetarians – they are weak

The Vegetarians were saying – the Carnivores for Christ – those meat eaters – how can they call themselves Christians? Are they even really Christians?

Paul says – stop it!!!!

And Paul takes it a step further –

Because I had you make a note of the phrase - but rather resolve this

And the translation is this – instead of judging others – do this instead.

And so Paul invites us to judge ourselves.

Paul invites us to examine ourselves to see if we are a source of stumbling to our brother or sister.

We are to do whatever will help our brother or sister in their journey of faith.

We are not to put spiritual land mines in their path –

And once again – I have to stress that Paul is speaking of grey areas here – nonessentials.

Turn to 1 Cor 8

[1Co 8:8-13 NKJV] 8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. 9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? 12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Same thing that Paul discusses in verse 13 – Paul write to the church in Corinth.

Paul says – for those of us that walk in liberty – those in the Carnivores for Christ camp, we have to watch out and make sure that we don't put a stumbling block in front of our vegetarian brothers (weak in the faith) and cause them to go against their convictions – which will result in guilt.

Paul doesn't tell those with liberty not to exercise it

He simply says – watch out. Be careful.

Church – I want us to truly understand that this whole thing has nothing to do with eating meat or not eating meat – it is all about how we relate to one another.

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.

Paul was convinced he had liberty in Christ in many morally gray issues.

But, he knew others didn't share that liberty.

If they were to do what he was free to, their conscience would condemn them; they'd feel unclean and disconnected from God.

Now – we have to remember that Paul was a Jew.

He was raised a Jew – he was one who observed the kosher diet his entire life.

All his life, he was rightly taught that certain foods were defiled, and only other foods were clean for eating.

For years his conscience had been trained that these foods were unclean.

Paul walks in liberty now – he is eating bacon cheeseburgers – but he also understands that others still struggle with their conscience of what they can eat or what they can't eat.

So Paul's advise is not to argue with the weak in faith and force them to walk in liberty – his advice is to be sensitive to what they believe. He wants us to act in love towards them.

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.

If I am strong in faith and walk in liberty to eat meat – if I decide to invite someone for dinner who is not strong in the faith and doesn't want in the same liberty and I force him or her to eat meat – to make a point that I am a point that I am stronger in faith that they are or to try to convince them that they are wrong and I am right –

Paul condemns this –

He says that I would not be walking in love

That I would be a stumbling block to that believer – that I would be hindering their walk

That I would be driving a wedge between my relationship with that person and that person's relationship with God.

So instead of flaunting our liberties – we are to walk in love

Because love is kind, love is patient, love is generous, love doesn't insist on having its own way,

Love is willing to limit liberty in order for there to be peace

Love is willing to limit liberty in order for there to be unity.

[Jhn 13:35 NKJV] 35 “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Love should drive us –

We should not be divided on things that we want to stand on our high horse

We cannot and must not use our liberties to be a hindrance to another Christian.

We need to show more grace toward one another

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.

The “good” things we have are the things we have a liberty to be doing.

These things are “good” to us.

But when we abuse our freedom by causing others to stumble, we cause them to speak badly of our liberty.

We want to act in such a way so as to not cause Christians to stumble or see our good works as evil.

The reason this is particularly important is because the kingdom of God is not about what we eat and drink.

Too often we get sidetracked with little, tiny, inconsequential issues.

The kingdom of God is not about exercising our liberties.

What's important is that we find life in the Holy Spirit.

Righteousness, peace, and joy are far more important in God's kingdom.

Righteousness has been the central theme of Romans.

This is not self-righteousness – we are not righteous

We have to be made righteousness

We are sinners by nature and by choice – and we can't become righteous by the things that we eat or neglect to eat or by the things that we wear or neglect to wear or by the music we hear or neglect to hear or by the presence of tattoos or piercings on our bodies.

We can only become righteous in Christ

We are pronounced justified by God through Jesus.

By the gospel of grace

This is what the kingdom of God is about.

[2Co 5:21 NKJV] 21 For He made Him who knew no sin [to be] sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Why is this so important?

Because when we experience the righteousness of God – in Christ – something happens inside of us.

We long for holiness

We thirst for God – we desire to seek Him more and more

And therefore God's righteousness inside of us – produces peace.

Not the absence of conflict – but peace with God

The confident assurance that we have been made right with God

And so Paul's argument is that if we been made right with God and we have deep fellowship with God through Christ – then why in the world would we not be connected with one another.

If we are no longer at war with God – we don't have to be at war with one another.

We remain at war with sin

And

We remain at war with our carnal nature

But not with each other -

We are not disturbed by the minor set backs and irritations and differences that are among us

18 For he who serves Christ in these things [is] acceptable to God and approved by men.

Our goal is not to “impress” people, but to “impact” them.

When they (those who are weak in faith) see that we care enough for others to limit our own freedoms, they begin to get a taste of what Jesus is all about. It’s all about His love.

19 Therefore let us pursue the things [which make] for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Love demands we lay down our rights to bless & protect others.

We are to pursue – we are to follow hard the things that make for peace and edification.

This means we are to make an effort to get along.

Not simply put up with one another or simply come to church and avoid one another.

We are to be actively seeking to build one another up – and if we are not pursuing this – Paul wants us to reconsider what we are doing.

Because nothing is more important than one another.

[Eph 4:29 NKJV] 29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

We are to build one another up – realizing that sometimes the truth hurts –

But we can still maintain peace in the way we speak truth.

Think about Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman –

[Jhn 4:16-18 NKJV] 16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' 18 "for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

Jesus told her truth – the woman was not offended – why?

Jesus' tone.

Jesus wrapped truth with love –

He genuinely cared for her

Tone matters

And sometimes we can be so harsh –

Paul says - we are to wrap our tone with love and peace

[Jas 3:10 NKJV] 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Some people make the excuse – that’s just the way I am – I was born this way – I have one tone – I speak my mind.

The bible says – for the believer, that is who you were.

We are a new creation in Christ – transformed –

We have a new DNA

We do everything in love

We can and we should change – by the power of the Holy Spirit

We have a new identity in Christ and because of this new identity we can treat people differently

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. 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.

Even though there is nothing wrong with eating things, if we do it to cause another person to stumble, then it becomes wrong.

We are not to rub it in –

The meat eaters – they could eat their meat in the privacy of their home –

Not because of legalism – but because out of love.

22 Do you have faith? Have [it] to yourself before God. Happy [is] he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

Paul gives us a warning here -

For those of us that walk in liberty – Paul says, more power to us – but we have to make sure that as we walk in our liberties, we don't hurt others.

There's a sense in which my personal convictions about the gray areas need to be my personal convictions.

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.

This is referring to the weak in the faith –

The moment that we doubt about doing something –

The moment that our conscience says – that was a bad choice, then it is sin.

We have to understand that pressure to ignore our conscience can come from our spouse, it can come from someone within the church

Paul's advice – follow your conscience.

Do not act against a doubting conscience, for whatever is not of faith is sin.

You see loved ones –

The believers in Rome – much in the same way as the church today -

They were wrongly judging others when they should have focused on loving them.

Instead of insisting their way was the right way, they should have adjusted their ways so not to cause others to stumble.

An Old Dead Guy –

Faith instructs our own conscience; love respects the consciences of others. Faith gives liberty; love limits its exercise.

Paul's guidelines are clear and helpful in reminding us how to love others even when others disagree with us.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Paul's main point in this entire section is that there is a kingdom of God, not a cuisine of God, that is the priority. And in God's kingdom, there is only one thing on the menu: unity—manifested by 'righteousness, peace and joy'"

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 '

May the LORD bless you and protect you.

May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'

