

Romans 14:13-19

13 Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. 14 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. 15 If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. 16 So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. 19 Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

We have seen wide spread problems with organized religion that creates an environment where people lapse due to judgmentalism. They fail to notice that Jesus boldly proclaims it is the judges that are judged. In today's Scripture the Apostle Paul teaches a Jesus lesson - you are not to pass judgment.

The Apostle Paul is in Corinth where he is planning a trip to stop in Rome on his way to Spain. While in Corinth, he writes to the Romans and invites them to provide for his journey. He is asking for money for a missionary offering to go to Jerusalem with funds from Greek churches. He has been taking up an offering for the poor. The Greeks have been generous and Paul hopes that the Romans will be generous too. So, he writes this letter, the main doctrine is that everyone is a sinner and deserves the penalty for sin but God pardons the repentant believers.

The Apostle Paul is concerned about a lack of Christian love, tolerance and charity. Now he faces the dilemma of addressing the internal tension within religion. Some demand the observance of regulations and others insist on our freedom in Christ. Paul explains his position with exhortations on the strong and weak. He clarifies the disparity between them; the weak need a structure like a young tree that needs to be staked. They need the constraints for support. The strong are free and do not need such constraints. However, the strong also have an obligation not to be the stumbling block of others. One group has a sense of right and wrong being regulated by diet. Their perspective is that salvation is a matter of pleasing God by observing the dietary regulations. The other group knows that God values the human being. Salvation comes from the love of God. Therefore, we have freedom in Christ with no restrictions.

Christ died for the human being. We follow the doctrine of Christ by accepting others and loving our neighbors. It is love that leads the heart to abstain. So, neither the strong nor the weak should censor the other. You are to act in love. You are not to challenge someone's belief, criticize, or judge. When you do, you fall into sin.

A controversy arose in Corinth over eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols. The regulations about food and observances of rituals are not important. It could be a lesson based on any number of divisive issues. The core matter is the treatment of different things as being clean or unclean. If one thinks it is wrong to do something then you need to be sensitive to the beliefs of others. Being a Christian is not about what you can and cannot do, or should and should not do, it's about righteousness, peace, and joy. At the heart of Christian unity is mutual tolerance. Our conduct is to be for the good of all, we are not to despise the other and it is wrong to encourage a violation of consciousness. Regulations don't matter and are not needed when we

have Christ. But we also have each other and we need to honor their beliefs. Live with God in faith and with others in consideration. Our goal is to please God. We have reciprocal love. The kingdom of God is not about material items, it's about love, righteousness, peace, joy, and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Nothing in nature is either clean or unclean, it's nature. Sometimes we might hear someone call a physical item stupid. Stomp a toe on a door and call the door stupid. We all know the door itself cannot possibly have intelligence. Therefore, it cannot be either smart or stupid. The same principal holds true with food, it is neutral, neither good or bad.

I was talking with a person in public. Often when someone finds out you area a preacher, they tend to talk about religion. This individual expressed frustration over people judging others instead of following the example of love set for us by Jesus. I talked about the necessity of following the Bible which is abundantly clear that we are to love even those that are hard to love. It is the Lord's decision that we love instead of judge. We need patience and consideration, not privilege. The gospel gives us liberty. Christ has won this liberty for us but we also must consider how our actions affect a neighbor. We are to promote peace and fellowship, and build up the religious community. We live to serve the Lord. We are encouraged to focus on the positive and uplifting, and avoid making life difficult for one another. Christians grow to maturity at different rates. One should not rush this. God's kingdom is one of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. People see our outward actions but God sees the heart.