

ALTARED STATE

"BEWARE: TRIP HAZARD"

ROMANS 14:13-23

Right theology is no excuse for wrong behavior. The "strong" Christians in Rome, who were predominately Gentiles, were right. Christians, even Jewish Christians, were no longer obligated to keep the OT/Jewish dietary laws and regulations regarding holy days, but not all of the Jewish Christians in the church had internalized the liberty of the gospel in this regard. They continued to have scruples. And while eating meat that might not be kosher was not a sin in an *absolute* sense, it was a sin in a *relative* sense, namely, for those who regarded it a sin. Now, the fact that the "strong" got it right and the "weak" did not was no excuse for the Gentile Christians to exercise their liberty in a way that brought spiritual harm to those Jewish Christians, who were distressed by their brothers' and sisters' "unscrupulous" ways. One commentator explains: "The Roman church, including as it did both Jewish and Gentile Christians, could speedily disintegrate if some sections insisted on exercising their Christian liberty to the full in complete disregard of the scruples of others. If, on the other hand, those whose consciences were thoroughly emancipated in this regard voluntarily restricted their liberty in the interest of others who had not reached the same state of spiritual maturity the

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– Martin Luther

church could become a perfect school of charity. This is what Paul urged upon the Christians of Rome" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC, 250). And it is what his words urge upon the church today, namely that it become "a perfect school of charity."

This Week's Core Competency

Kindness/Goodness – I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Without using the word "kindness," Paul presents it as the solution to a problem faced by Christians in Rome. Those with "strong" faith, who eat everything and consider every day alike, were tempted to treat the "weak" with contempt, and those with "weak" faith, who eat only vegetables and consider certain days as sacred, were tempted to "judge" the "strong." Those temptations could be avoided by both groups showing kindness to one another. The "strong" in particular could do so by forgoing their rights and not eating meat, drinking wine, or doing anything else that would distress or destroy their brothers and sisters, that is, hinder their spiritual formation. The "strong" should not insist on exercising their liberty in front of the "weak" in such a way as to pressure them into doing what their consciences forbade them to do. But would that not require those who got it right, to live according to the defective convictions of those who did not? Not exactly.

The following caveat is helpful. "To be sure, Paul does not want the 'strong' to walk around in constant fear lest something they do might 'injure' a 'weak' believer; little would be left of Christian

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liberty were this to be the case. We are probably justified in introducing here some of those limitations that Paul brings up in the parallel 1 Cor. 8-10 passage, where he urges the 'strong' to go ahead with their legitimate behavior as long as no 'weak' Christian is being harmed (1 Cor. 10:25-29). I may know, for instance, that some believers do not think a certain practice 'right' for Christians. I should not refrain for that reason, but only if I think that my practice might bring spiritual harm to other believers. Finally, we must emphasize: Paul is not advocating that any Christian give up his or her liberty (which no human being can take from the believer); he is advocating only that we be willing, for the sake of others, to give up our exercise of Christian liberty [on specific occasions in certain circumstances]. Luther's famous formulation, 'A Christian man is a most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all'" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 883).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 14:13-23

13 *Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. 14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. 15 If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.*

19 *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.*

22 *So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "therefore" indicating *result* in vv. 13, 16, 19.
- * Underline "passing judgment" and "make up your mind" in v. 13.
- * Box "instead" indicating *contrast* in v. 13.
- * Circle "stumbling block" and "obstacle" in v. 13.
- * Circle "unclean" in v. 14.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 14, 17, 20, 23.

- * Circle "destroy" in vv. 15, 20.
- * Bracket "kingdom of God" in v. 17.
- * Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 18.
- * Underline "the work of God" in v. 20.
- * Circle "stumble" in v. 20.
- * Bracket "from faith" in v. 23.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Who is Paul telling to "make up *your* mind" (v. 13b), his "weak" or his "strong" readers, or both? Explain.

2. Explain the *contrast* in verse 14 and give an example.

3. How could what one Christian *eats* "distress" and "destroy" another Christian?

4. If the kingdom of God is *not* a matter of "eating and drinking," explain what it is a matter of and why.

5. In their "body life" together as Christians, what should each one strive to do?

6. To what does "the work of God" (v. 20) refer?

7. Is Paul saying in verse 21 that no Christian should ever do "anything" that any other Christian thinks is wrong?

8. Put what verse 23 means in your own words.

9. **Discussion:** "To eat, or not to eat, that is *not* the question" today. Talk about a contemporary issue analogous to the one Paul addresses in Romans 14:13-23.

day **3** **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

In Romans 14:1-12, Paul tells those with "weak" faith, who eat only vegetables and consider certain days as sacred, to "not judge" (v. 3b) those with "strong" faith, and tells those with "strong" faith, who eat everything and consider every day alike, to "not treat with contempt" (v. 3a) those with "weak" faith, because "we all will stand before God's judgment seat" (v. 10) and "each of us will give an account of ourselves to God" (v. 12). Verse 13, which begins with "therefore," linking verses 13-23 to verses 1-12, contains a clever transition built on two meanings of the same Greek word (*krino*) "to judge." The transition is obscured by the NIV's translation, "stop passing judgment" and "make up your mind" but is made obvious by the KJV's translation, "Let us not therefore *judge* one another any more: but *judge* this rather." In the first clause, "judge" means "criticize"; in the second, it means "decide." One commentator observes: "Paul sums up what has been said before by saying his audience should resolve to stop judging one another, but this does not mean he wants them to give up judging altogether. In fact, he wants them to exercise good judgment so as not to set up any obstacles for a brother or sister" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 338).

What follows in verses 14-23 is a warning, largely to those with "strong" faith, against abusing Christian liberty by not acting in love. Paul first affirms liberty by confirming, "All food is clean." He then demands love by declaring, "but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble" (v. 20), and goes on to expand the application of his warning, insisting, "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or *to do anything else* that will cause your brother or sister to fall" (v. 21).

The content of verses 14-23 is arranged *chiastically*, that is, the ideas in them are repeated in reverse order:

- A Warning about stumbling blocks (13b)
- B Nothing is "unclean" in itself (14a)
 - C Warning about destroying one for whom Christ died (15b)
 - C' Warning about tearing down the work of God (20a)
 - B' All things are "clean" in themselves (20b)
- A' Warning about causing another believer to stumble (21)

A) Paul tells his readers to not "put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister" (13b). Those with "strong" faith are not to exercise their Christian liberty at the expense of those with "weak" faith. In other words, they are not to do anything that might cause a Christian brother or sister to stumble or be tempted to sin (i.e., do what they regard as sin) along their way to spiritual maturity. Paul puts it this way to those with "strong" faith in Corinth: "I have the right to do anything,' you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others" (1Co 10:23-24).

B) He is convinced that the "strong" are correct. When it comes to food, "nothing is unclean in itself" (v. 14a). Nevertheless, for those who feel obligated to obey the OT/Jewish food laws and regard something as unclean, it is unclean for them; eating it has the same effect on their consciences as if eating it were, in fact, a sin. One commentator writes: "Paul does not see the Mosaic requirements about such things as obligatory for Christians, even Jewish Christians, and it also means he agrees with 'the strong' or Gentiles on this point, rather than with 'the weak' or Jewish Christians. But the second half of v. 14 is distinctive and shows some ethical nuancing on Paul's part. If a person regards something as unclean or 'common' (that is, profane, as the word actually means), then it is unclean for him or her" (Witherington, 339).

C) That said, the "strong" must not disregard the spiritual welfare of the "weak" (v. 15b). The same commentator adds: "If one's perfectly legitimate choice of food and drink causes another to stumble, and one insists on doing it one's own way and scandalizing a fellow Christian, v. 15 indicates that such a person, even though he has not violated his own conscience, has violated the law of love for the brother or sister" (339). Injuring spiritually those for whom Christ died by brazenly violating what they deem to be proper Christian scruples thereby belittling their convictions puts a roadblock—having nothing to do with "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit," things that really matter—in the way of their formation.

C') That being the case, as Christians do life together, they are to "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" of the body of Christ (v. 19). Destroying "the work of God" over disputes regarding food is senseless and sinful (v. 20a). By the way, one commentator calls verses 19-21, containing C', B', and A', "a second coat of paint on the same argument" (N. T. Wright, "Romans," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 10:741), i.e., the one in verses 13-18.

B') "All food is clean," Paul says directly (v. 20b) leaving no room for doubt, but he immediately qualifies his affirmation of Christian liberty. Speaking to the "strong" he goes on to say, "it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble." "The 'person who eats' here is the 'strong believer.' Paul is therefore warning the 'strong' believer that it is wrong for him or her to eat 'while causing offense' or 'if it causes [another] to stumble'; cf. NRSV: 'it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat'" (Moo, 860).

A') Taking full advantage of one's Christian liberty is good, but limiting it by not eating meat, drinking wine, or doing anything else that will cause another to fall (v. 21) is better. By broadening the application of his warning to include "anything else," Paul makes it clear that the issue is not a matter limited to eating and drinking. It involves everything having similar consequences.

So, Paul concludes, "whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God" (v. 22). In a nutshell, he doesn't demand that "strong" Christians change their convictions or live according to the convictions of "weak" Christians. But they are to recognize that from time to time they must limit the exercise of their freedom in order to avoid condemning themselves by what they approve. They are to be discreet and not rub the noses of others in their Christian liberty.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Rather than let the exercise of your Christian liberty become a stumbling block to another believer, don't do anything that will trip up a brother or sister in Christ.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

You firmly believe you have the freedom to drink wine, but a close friend strongly believes Christians should abstain—would you drink in front of that person, or invite them to a gathering at your home at which you planned to serve wine? Apply Paul's instructions to your situation.

In the same vein, you never watch "R" rated movies, many of your friends do. Netflix Night is at one of their homes this week—would you go, would you watch the movie regardless? How would you handle the situation?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 13 **judgment . . . mind** Paul uses 'the word 'judge' [*krinein*] in a verbal play impossible to reproduce in English. The word changes its sense (though it retains the fundamental meaning of 'come to a decision'), and also its tense, for whereas the reader has been told to stop judging, he is now urged to come, once for all, to a specific judgement" (C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 262).

v. 13 **stumbling block, obstacle** "A stumbling block (*proskomma*) is literally something against which one may strike his foot, causing him to stumble or even fall. The second term (*skandalon*, rendered 'obstacle' here) present a different picture, that of a trap designed to ensnare a victim. It is used of something that constitutes a temptation to sin" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:149). Both words took on a metaphorical sense referring to a spiritual downfall. "The words are essentially synonymous here" (Moo, 851).

v. 14 **in the Lord Jesus** Paul is emphatic, "nothing is unclean in itself." "In the passage before us the apostle seems to have reference to some utterance made by our Lord during his earthly ministry (note the human name 'Jesus' here). We find it in Mark 7:15-23, where the Master declares that one is not rendered unclean by what goes into him but rather by what comes out of him, from his inner life. Mark adds the comment that in this pronouncement Jesus declared all foods 'clean.' But not everyone has been enlightened on this issue, and if one is convinced in his heart that some foods are unclean (e.g., in terms of the Levitical food laws), for him such foods remain unclean. Until he is convinced otherwise, it would violate his conscience to partake of them" (Harrison, 148).

v. 14 **unclean** I.e., certain foods (Lev 11:1-23; Dt 14:3-20; cf., Ac 10:9-15. The question revolves around what to eat. "The word 'unclean' is a term that originally means common and then came to mean defiled or impure (cf. Mark 7:2, 5; Acts 10:14; Heb. 10:29; Rev. 21:27). That 'nothing is unclean of itself' is the justification of the belief entertained by the strong that he may eat all things (vs. 2) and is the reason why abstinence on the part of some is due to weakness of faith" (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 188). "Gal 2:1ff. and the apostolic decree of Acts 15:20, 29 show the deep conflicts this question involved in the pre-Pauline community. Jewish-Christians, who still felt obliged to keep the law of holiness, must have experienced a constant personal threat in dealing with Gentile-Christians, and must have seen in their free-thinking colleagues something like defectors. At stake were observance of the Torah on the one side and the unity of the community on the other" (Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 374).

v. 15 **distressed, destroy** "How is the 'brother' grieved? (i) The mere sight of a Christian doing what he (however wrongly) regards as sinful will give pain to his sensitive conscience. (ii) He may nevertheless be emboldened by his fellow's example to do that which he regards as sinful; but he will do it with a bad conscience, as a waverer, who is condemned by his doubts (v. 23). Thus the attitude of the strong Christian, unless carefully regulated, is almost certain to result in injury to the weak Christian" (Barrett, 263).

v. 16 **good, evil** "The good is naturally understood as the liberty to eat, since all foods are regarded as clean. This liberty, however, if resented because it has been flaunted in the face of the weak, can be regarded as an evil thing on account of its unloving misuse" (Harrison, 148-49)—not to mention its dire consequences (vv. 15, 20).

v. 17 **kingdom of God** I.e., the present manifestation of the future kingdom evident in the exaltation of Jesus (Ac 2:33, 36), the power of the Spirit, and the availability of spiritual blessings contained in the new covenant (Jer 31:32-33; cf., Lk 22:20; 1Co 11:25; 2Co 3; Heb 8).

v. 20 **work of God** Paul's reference to "mutual edification" (v. 19) likely goes beyond the edification of individual believers to the building up of the church as a whole, which would suggest that his reference to destroying the "work of God" likely goes beyond the tearing down of individual believers to the tearing down of church as a whole. "Paul is warning 'strong' believers that they can seriously damage the church—destroy its unity and sap it strength-through their attitudes and actions toward the 'weak.' And they cause this damage 'for the sake of food'—because they persist in behaving in a certain way in a matter this is peripheral, at best, to the kingdom of God" (Moo, 860).

v. 23 **from faith** "This verse, in contrast to verse 22, seems addressed particularly to the weak. The weak brother, who eats something that he believes he should not eat, stands 'condemned' by his own conscience and by God (cf. Gal. 2:11). His action is contrary to what he believes is right. 'Faith' here, as in verses 1 and 22, does not refer to the teachings of Christianity—but to what a person believes to be the will of God for him [i.e., conviction]. If a person does what he believes to be wrong ('eats' with 'doubts'), even though it is not wrong in itself, it becomes 'sin' for him. He has violated what he believes to be God's will. His action has become an act of rebellion against God for him" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 202-203, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

They say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, but what if it does? We have an idea of the adults we want our kids to be, but what if they don't turn out exactly as we plan? I have a great friend whose son sings in a major metropolitan opera. His ability to sing, much less opera, was a total surprise to his parents, who self-admittedly possess no singing ability whatsoever. In fact, they never knew he was gifted in the art of voice until his junior high choir director pointed it out. Similarly, what if your child's faith is played out differently than what you expect or looks different from yours? You may be an amazing prayer warrior with no fear of praying out loud in a group. Your child hates group settings and finds it difficult to pray over the family dinner. You firmly know you are not called to overseas missions, but your child, at the tender age of ten, has a heart for the people of Laos and can't wait to share the gospel there. Parents, it's ok to hold loosely to what we think our child's faith should look like within the Biblical boundaries. What a blessing it is to see how God uses our kids as they grow in wisdom, stature, and favor with the Lord. I am praying for your child to claim their faith as their own and for you to enjoy the privilege and blessing of watching this develop.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Ro 14:13-23

1. What should we stop doing?
2. What is a stumbling block?
3. What are the things that the kingdom of God is not and what are the things that the kingdom of God is?

What Do You Think

Is this passage about food? What do you think it's about?

What R U Going To Do

Make a goal to do one random act of kindness each day and see how others react.

Core Comp

Kindness/Goodness - Treating others better than myself

Memory Verse

Review Romans 12:1-5.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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