

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 14, Verses 10-23
Notes from Tuesday May 10, 2011
Last Revised on May 16, 2011

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

This evening we continue our study of the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Last week we **began** Chapter 14.

Tonight I expect to **finish** Chapter 14.

Once again, please note that we are coming very near to the end of our study of Romans.

After tonight, we will need only another two or three weeks to finish. So let's start thinking about whether we want the class to continue and, if so, what we will study next. (Hand out survey sheet.)

OK, then. Before reading on into Chapter 14, I will briefly **review** what we have read before now.

Review

As we have repeatedly reminded ourselves,

the **overall** theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is the **gospel**.

The gospel is set forth briefly in the **first four (4) chapters** of this letter.

In the **next** four chapters (i.e. Chapters 5 - 8), Paul examines some of the **implications** of the gospel, for those of us who are being **saved** by it.

The third major section of this letter, consisting of **Chapters 9 through 11**, examines the **sad** history of the Jews who have **rejected** the gospel, but who have thereby served to manifest God's grace and mercy.

It is on the basis of the "***mercies of God***," set forth in the first **11** chapters, that Paul calls for proper Christian **behavior**, in the last major section of this letter, which runs from the

beginning of Chapters 12 through the first paragraph or two of Chapter 15.

This is the section of the letter that we have recently been studying, and will continue to study this evening.

Let's remember what Paul has taught us, so far in this section, about Christian behavior.

In the first Chapter of this section, Chapter 12, Paul asks his readers to stop being conformed to this world, but instead to allow God to transform them, by the renewing of their minds.

He goes on to describe the transformed person, who is called to exhibit genuine love in all things, even to those who persecute him.

In Chapter 13, Paul points out that the transformed Christian person willingly and gladly pays to governing authorities, and to all other groups and individuals, all of the taxes, revenues, respect and obedience due to them.

We hold nothing back for ourselves, and in this way we promote peace in the church, and in the home, and in the world.

The only debt we should owe to anyone, Paul says, is to love one another, and in this way we fulfill all of the laws and commandments that there are.

In Chapter 14, which we began last week and will finish this evening, Paul picks up the thought that, among the group of Christian believers in Rome that he is addressing, there are some differences.

Some of them are comparatively stronger in faith than others, by which Paul here appears to mean that some of them have a comparatively better understanding of the gospel and its implications,

and in particular some have a comparatively better understanding of the extent to which the old laws regarding ritual food purity and special days of religious observance have been overtaken by the gospel.

In other words, some people correctly understand that it is OK to eat anything, while others still believe that certain foods are ritually unclean.

Some people correctly understand that all days are alike, while others still believe that certain days are especially holy.

It seems clear to me that Paul is saying that the "strong ones" are the ones with the broader

view of Christian liberty --- i.e. the ones who correctly understand that we can eat all things and that all days are alike.

To these **strong** ones, Paul says, “**welcome** the weak and do **not** quarrel with them, over their opinions about food and days and etc.”

To the **weak** (i.e. those with a lot of special religious rules) Paul says, do not look down on those who do not follow your **religious rules**.

To both groups Paul says: it is **God** and not man who judges these things.

This concludes my quick **review** of all that we have read and studied so far in this letter, up through **Verse 9** of **Chapter 14**.

Do any of you have any **comments** or **questions** before we read on?

I have one comment: I think it is important to notice that Paul is here, **for the most part**, speaking **specifically** of food and the observance of special days. (i.e. These are not just examples.)

He once mentions **drink** as well as food, as we shall see in today’s reading.

He occasionally does seem **intentionally** to generalize --- i.e. to take what he has been saying about food and drink and special days and apply it to **broader** and **more general** spiritual truths.

But I think we should be careful **not** to read Paul more generally here than the **text** will allow.

Which is to say that we should do our best to understand what Paul is **actually** saying and **meaning**, and not read into the text something which Paul did not intend to teach.

It would be easy to make that mistake in this chapter, I think.

Paul’s Letter to the Romans, Chapter 14, Verses 10-12

OK then, Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 14, Verses 10-12, in **Japanese**.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in **English**.

10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

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 will give an account of himself to God.

Verse 10 reads:

(Verse 10)

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

Notice first of all the repeated use of the word "*brother.*"

Here, fairly clearly, Paul is continuing the discourse begun in the first nine verses of Chapter 14,

which had to do with certain differences between Christian believers (i.e. brothers in Christ),

and with the relationships between believers who are relatively strong and weak in faith.

Notice second of all that Paul here lapses into the second person singular.

"Why do you pass judgment on your brother."

"Or you, Why do you despise your brother."

It is as if Paul is addressing two different persons in turn,

first to a "*weak*" brothers and then to a "*strong*" one.

The "weak" believer, interestingly, may exhibit the greatest self discipline, the strongest work ethic, and the most pious demeanor: he is prone to "works righteousness" like the Pharisees who followed Jesus about.

The "strong" believer, on the other hand, understands the gospel better, but it is interesting that he is the one who must be reminded not to be disdainful and aloof from his weaker brothers; he is in constant danger of becoming what Karl Barth called a "Pharisee of Freedom".

How strange to despise and exclude a brother in Christ in the name of Christian Liberty.

How strange to embrace the gospel of freedom and then to judge a brother in Christ for not

following some set of unimportant rules.

Perhaps it was **easy** for Paul to differentiate between these two groups of people in the church in Rome in his day: the strong and the weak.

Perhaps these were simply those in the church who, at that time, were more or less able to discontinue those ritual practices set forth in the Old Testament, which had become unnecessary since the coming of Christ. Perhaps this less has little left to say to us?

Surely most parts of the modern church are less preoccupied by those **particular** concerns: i.e. food purity and special days, although some of those issues still survive on the boundaries between the denominations.

Q. But within a **particular** denomination, let's say, or to make this easy, within a particular **church** such as ours, are there still some issues like this that survive today, and to which we can apply the lesson Paul is teaching here?

Q. Do we still judge or despise others for conforming or not conforming to our own personal ideas and standards concerning these things?

A. Yes,

Q. What are some examples?

A. Days set aside for worship and other activities.

A. Style and content of worship, preaching, teaching, prayer.

A. Style and content of church and personal ministries and programs

A. Many Others

I suppose that most of us are **constantly** guilty of **both** things that Paul warns the Romans against?

i.e. of variously passing **judgment** on and **despising** our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Here in verse 10, Paul asks us **why**.

Why do we judge? **Why** do we despise?

Perhaps these are not real questions.

Perhaps Paul just means to point out how utterly pointless it is for us to compare ourselves with on another.

“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”

And we know that each one of us will be required to account for himself.

God is not going to ask me what I think about you,

and he is not going to ask you what you think about me:

Verse 11 continues:

(Verse 11)

for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

Comparing ourselves favorably to others will not avail in the judgment and it accomplishes nothing good here and now.

(n.b. this does not set aside the point we are studying presently in Philippians about the importance of imitating the good behavior of others)

This point is driven home in Verse 12 which reads:

(Verse 12)

So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

There is just no good reason for comparing ourselves to our brothers and sisters in Christ, either to pass judgment on them or to despise them.

But suppose for the moment that Paul's questions in verse 10 are real questions, and not merely rhetorical.

Then these questions are interesting.

Q. Why do we believers in Christ constantly pass judgment on one another and despise one another?

A. Pride - to make ourselves intrinsically righteous - to stand in the place of God.

A. **Fear** - supposing that we can turn aside God's wrath by pointing to the sins of others.

A. **Lack of Faith** - we don't really believe the gospel of grace

A. It is **sin** and **Satan** trying to erase the gospel, one way or the other.

Let's read on.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 14, Verses 13-19

Will someone please read Verses 13-19 in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

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 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

16 So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Thank you.

From what we have already read thorough Verse 12, no **good** purpose is served, and much **evil** is done, whenever we pass judgment on a brother.

"Therefore," Paul says in Verse 13, ...

(Verse 13)

[Therefore] let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

We must simply **not** pass judgment,

not in the **sense** that Paul means here,

which is the sense of judging **others** negatively by our own **personal standards**,

especially (to be very clear) where things like **ritual food purity laws** are concerned.

and as we have already discussed there may be **some** things in the modern church which are **like** the ritual food purity laws and which, therefore, are amenable to the lesson Paul is teaching here.

Rather than being in “judgment mode” about such things, we should be in “love mode,”

meaning that we must be **more** concerned with **not harming a brother**,

than we are with claiming our **rights** or promoting our personal **preferences**.

Paul gives a real illustration in verse 14, which reads:

(Verse 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.

It is easy to **mis**read this verse.

I **used** to think that it meant simply that it was OK for **Paul** to eat anything because he knew that it was **OK** to do so,

but that it would **not** be OK for someone else to eat that which **he believed** to be unclean.

That simple meaning **also** still holds, I think.

but I now understand that the primary meaning of this Verse 14 is that it would actually be unclean (i.e. wrong) for **Paul** to eat that which someone **else** thinks is unclean, **even though** Paul knows that there is nothing unclean in itself.

This more robust reading is supported by Verse 15 which continues:

(Verse 15)

For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

Taking Paul as an example,

he **knows** that nothing is unclean in **itself**,

yet he **also** knows that there are brothers who firmly believe that certain things **are** unclean,

and if Paul should **eat** these things, then he would **harm** those brothers,

even to the point of turning them away from **Christ** and salvation.

And **nothing** could be worse (more unclean) than that.

This is why Paul **elsewhere** speaks of becoming **all things to all people** so that some might be saved.

And this explains all that might otherwise seem **paradoxical** or **inconsistent** about how food purity laws are treated in Acts and Galatians and elsewhere in the New Testament.

The principle at work is ... simply ... **love**.

We **never** have the right to be unloving.

Which means that, insofar as this is possible, we must bow to the sensibilities of **others**.

This is the sense of Verse 16 which reads

(Verse 16)

So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.

In other words and with the necessary exceptions,

if **other** people think something is evil, we **must** not do it.

This might offend those of us who are big on asserting our "**freedom in Christ**"

But, once again, Christ does **not** set us free to be unloving.

Verse 17 reads

(Verse 17)

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

If we **refrain** from eating, or drinking, or anything else which we understand to be permissible in itself but which we know to be offensive to a brother, the Kingdom of God is **not diminished** thereby.

The Kingdom of God is not **about** asserting personal **rights** or **freedoms**.

The Kingdom of God is about **love**, about placing ourselves **last**, about **peace**.

It is about joy, **not** in the **human** spirit, but in the **Holy** Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit is not constrained by our **food** or **drink**!

When we are **led** by the **Spirit** of God, whatever we do is acceptable to **God**.

Verse 18 reads

(Verse 18)

Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

There are, of course, times when we are led by the Holy Spirit to do things which do **not**, at first, meet with the approval of man!

However such cases are rarer than we suppose (i.e. what pleases God most often pleases man also) and such cases reflect only the fact that men have so far **misunderstood** what God has led us to do.

The **Godly** path and the **loving** path are the same, and this is also the path of **true peace**,

which is not to say that we will be spared conflict with the **forces of evil** at work in the world,

but we should mostly be free from conflict with our true brothers and sisters **in Christ**.

We simply seek first whatever is best **for them** and forget about ourselves.

So Verse 19 reads:

(Verse 19)

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Brothers and sisters in Christ should only rarely find themselves in conflict with each another and, then, only to the extent that seems necessary to build one another up and cultivate true peace.

Questions? Comments?

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 14, Verses 20-23

Would someone please read the remainder of Chapter 14, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now would someone please read those some verses in English.

20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.

21 It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

22 The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

OK, then. Consistent with what we have previously read and discussed, Verse 20 reads:

(Verse 20)

Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.

To the church that Paul was primarily addressing in Rome, he was saying to each of his readers who needed to hear it, “place the needs of others before your own personal rights and preferences,”

“you have no right to do anything that causes someone else to stumble.”

Verse 21 seems to be a generalizing statement that takes this lesson beyond food and drink.

It reads:

(Verse 21)

It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

This is a fairly radical statement!

Most likely the people in Rome who had rigid rules about food and drink were in the **minority**,

but to follow Paul's teaching here, it seems that, for so long as this minority held to their views, the rest of the church should **share** in the minority eating habits, perhaps to the extent of not eating any meat at all.

The same with **wine**.

This is so contrary to the way in which the **world** works, and so consistent with Christ and his kingdom, where the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

In a really good church, it seems, much of what goes on should be determined **not** by the strong, but by the weak!!

The strong will be **particularly** careful not to assert their strength in ways that might harm those who are weaker than themselves.

Verse 22 reads:

(Verse 22)

The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

This is a hard verse.

I think the first sentence means that, even when we are **right**, we should not **express** our views, whenever the primary demand that we love one another can be better served by our **silence**.

We should speak **only** to edify and to build up.

I think the second sentence means that we should each **discern** what God approves and then behave **accordingly**.

We may not all come to precisely the **same** conclusion regarding that which is approved by God, which is the backdrop of this whole Chapter, but we should all honestly **try** to understand what is right before God and then behave in accordance with such understanding as God has given us.

This certainly does **not** mean that whatever we can do with a clean conscience is OK. There is, to quote Calvin, a vast difference between stupidity and discernment.

And it occurs to me that many a psychopath does **abominable** things with a clean conscience.

However to act **against** one's conscience is always a sin, no matter how lawful the thing which we have done may be in itself.

That is the sense of the final Verse 23.

(Verse 23)

But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Here I think it is best to remember what appears to have been Paul's **primary** topic --- i.e. the actual problems surrounding the eating habits of the Christians in Rome.

Some of them, **like Paul**, understood that nothing is unclean in itself. Because of this understanding such men could eat anything without committing a sin, provided only that by eating they did not harm another believer whose beliefs were different.

Other men, however, could not shake the sense that certain things were **ritually unclean**, i.e. forbidden by God.

For them, to eat certain things would have been a **sin** --- a **real sin**, and not an imaginary one.

Because we sin whenever we do something which is **contrary to God's will** as we understand it.

And not everyone has the **same** understanding regarding God's will at every point.

That seems to be Paul's teaching here.

Q. Can you think of some **examples**, of things that **may** or **may not** be sins depending on the beliefs of those who do them?

A. Drinking, smoking, dancing, tithing, baptism, attending non-Christian funerals, etc.

Closing Prayer