

Romans – Bible Study – Chapter 14:13-23; Chapter 15:1-7

In the last study, we looked at how the ‘weaker’ believer is to relate and respect the ‘stronger’ believer by not being judgmental. However, it also applies to the ‘stronger’ believer and how they are not to look down on those who do not exercise the same liberties they do.

Paul continues on this theme in this next set of passages and focuses on how the ‘stronger’ believer should act towards others, especially ‘weaker’ believers.

Do Not Cause Another to Stumble

(Verses 13-19) What does a “stumbling block” look like and what does it do? Why is Paul giving such a dire warning to the ‘stronger’ believer to avoid doing such things (1 Corinthians 8:9-12)? What are some consequences of such action(s) (Matthew 18:6-7; Luke 17:1-2)? What is the difference between ‘grieved’ and ‘destroy’ in relation to one’s actions? What should our primary focus be with regards to the Kingdom of God?

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 (20b)

B – All things are ‘**clean**’ in themselves (20b)

A – Warning about causing another believer to **stumble** (21)

- It is an object that is put in a person’s path, where the person cannot avoid and will strike their foot against, causing them to stumble or fall
- Can also be described as a snare used to catch an animal or victim as it walk by
- The dire warning is given because the ‘stronger’ Christian’s liberty can impede a ‘weaker’ Christian’s progress as he walks the Christian path
- **1 Corinthians 8:9-12** – Our conduct can condemn us if it brings down or harms a fellow Christian, especially if what we do causes the fellow believer to betray his conscience
- By making a fellow believer betray his conscience, it is akin to making him sin as he goes against what he thinks is wrong
- Our actions should be that of love, not one of destruction
- **Matthew 18:6-7** – Even worse, it could set him back temporarily or even cause permanent damage to his sensitive conscience
- To be ‘**grieved**’ means to cause a person pain when he/she sees another doing what his own conscience condemns
- To ‘**destroy**’ means when a person proceeds to do what his conscience condemns and leads to him sinning and experiences moral destruction
- This is something we are to avoid in our conduct as this not how we should love others
- It would be terrible for a Christian to destroy someone whom our Lord has saved

- The welfare of a fellow believer should take precedence over our liberty to do something amoral (1 Corinthians 8:13)
- The primary issues in the lives of dedicated Christians should not be external amoral practices, but the great spiritual qualities that the Holy Spirit seeks to produce in them
- These include righteousness, peace with God (Phil 4:7), and joy
- In all things, we should be pleasing God
- Instead of tearing down others, we should do things that build one another up (1 Corinthians 10:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:11)
 - For the strong, this may mean foregoing some legitimate amoral practice
 - For the weak, it may mean refraining from verbal criticism and judgmental thinking

(Verses 20-23) What should believers not do when conducting their affairs? How are we to exercise our liberties (i.e. when to exercise and when not to)? What type of accommodations should we make for others? What is the warning to the 'weaker' believer?

- They are not to make their amoral practices the primary focus of their conduct, but rather it should be on the things that God asks us to do
- Do not exercise your liberty if it will cause spiritual problems for someone else
- This will destroy the work that God is doing in building His church
 - While freedom is a right, it is not a guide for conduct. Love serves that purpose. Rights are to be laid aside in the interest of love
- One is not to force their convictions (faith) about amoral practices on others
- If our action is or can be detrimental to the spiritual health of another, we should abstain from exercising that right as it may cause another to sin.
- The strong believer can be happy in his private enjoyment of amoral practices because he knows that he is not violating God's will nor the conscience of a weak believer
- The weak believer should do what his conscience dictates for him to do
- The weaker believer who eats something that he believes he should not, stands 'condemned' by his own conscience and by God
- His action is contrary to what he believes is right
- If a person does what he believes to be wrong (i.e. 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

The Example of Christ

(Chapter 15:1-6) What should the goal of our behavior as a Christian living in the church (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)? What is the overall goal/objective of our conduct towards one another? What does Paul say about the Old Testament scriptures in relation to our overall goal/objective?

- **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** - The goal of our behavior should be other person's welfare ("good") and spiritual 'edification'
- We should not please others rather than God, but we should please others rather than ourselves
- We should be "people lovers", not "people pleasers"
- The overall goal is to build up God's church by building up the members
- As well, our conduct should show love towards one another as Christ has commanded us to do

- We are to live in harmony with one another
- Christians should show as strong of a commitment to building up God's spiritual house, as David displayed in promoting His physical house.
- It provides motivation for enduring ('perseverance') and gives 'encouragement' as we seek to remain faithful in our commitment to do God's will
- These 'Scriptures' give us hope because in them we see God's approval for those who persevered faithfully in spite of opposition and frustration (Hebrews 11)
- Through the building and edification of others, we promote unity within God's church so that we can glorify Him with one voice

Christian Conduct Principles:

1. Not to **judge** the practice of other **Christians** in respect of doubtful things (14:3)
2. Personally **accountable** to God for our actions (14:12)
3. Not to do anything that will put a **stumbling** block before others (14:13)
4. Have Christian **liberty** regarding what we do (14:14, 20)
5. To do what will **edify** others (14:19)
6. Should, for the sake of their **weaker** believers, voluntarily **abstain** from certain practices (14:21)
7. To do only what can be done without **self-condemnation** (14:22)
8. To follow the **example** of Christ, who did not live to **please** Himself (15:1-3)

Paul's emphasis in this passage is that we are to bear with one another in love since it is one of the primary purposes God has called for us, not on amoral issues. There is Christian liberty that we are entitled to when considering amoral issues. How we use it (or don't use it) should be determined by the love we have for others and that our action is intended to build up others and to encourage one another. We are also to live in peace with each other, so that we are united as the church and body of Christ, worshipping and giving praise to Him.

Points to Ponder:

- Are your actions done out of love for others or for yourself?
- Are you actively seeking to build up and encouraging others?