

Does It Really Matter?

Part 3

Romans 14:13-23

October 30th, 2011

We have entered into what I have come to believe is a profound passage of Scripture as it relates to the Christian life. It is not in order to become a Christian, but to reveal to others that we really are children of God. What Paul will teach in Romans 14:13-23 is based on what he taught us in verses 1-12, especially verses 10-12, so let's not lose that connection.

Scripture

"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. 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. 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. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. 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. It is

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

When it comes to matters of conscience, there are some in the Church that when it comes to certain things, they are going to be strong-minded, they are going to have their minds made up. There is not a doubt in their mind whether it is right or wrong. But then there are others in the Church that have not come to that place of confidence yet in their conscience and they have doubts, and they are just not sure. So they err on the side of caution, and they abstain from eating certain things, and observing certain days. Then, what we discovered in the Church at Rome, (and it's probably no different than churches today) sometimes people who are strong-minded judge those who are weak-minded. Sometimes those who are weak-minded actually disdain those who are strong-minded, and vice-versa. In the Church at Rome, you had one group judging the other, and you had the other disdaining the one who was judging. Paul is saying how dare you have an attitude that allows you to judge your brother or look down your nose at him and think you are on a higher level than he! He is your brother, he is not your servant. He belongs to God, and God will judge him.

Then, we learned that God will judge us. Every believer in Christ will stand before God at the judgment seat of Christ and give an account for his matters of conscience. Wow...Have you thought about this? One day our life lived on earth will be reviewed by Jesus Christ before His Father, and you and I will give an account. Therefore, knowing that I am going to be judged by God, I don't want to stand before Him as a judge. I don't want Him to bring up all of the times I acted in His place and passed judgment on fellow brothers and sisters.

Do Not Pass Judgment

Verse 13 begins, "*Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide...*" Now in the Greek, this word, "*decide*," is the same root word as 'pass judgment' in the first part of this verse. So, if you and I were Greek students as the audience was in Paul's day, we would pick up that Paul is doing a play on words. He is saying don't negatively judge others, but positively judge yourselves.

The word, judge, means 'to separate and make an evaluation about certain facts concerning certain cases.' So it literally means 'to discriminate, to distinguish.' When we pass judgment on others, many times we are reacting to what other people do. You weren't ready for it, you were caught off guard, and you make a judgment. Paul is saying don't react *to* others, but act *toward* others. When it comes to others, make the decision in your mind to separate and distinguish, and not judge them; the person you will judge is yourself. The judgment you need to make is to never put a cause of stumbling or a hindrance in the path of my brother.

Think about when the writer of Hebrews finished out his sermon. He came to the application part and reminded the Church that they had a great cloud of witnesses, and that they were actually running a race, a marathon. He warned the runner about stripping themselves of weight and the sin which can so easily beset them. When we are running our race, there is a danger in each of our lives of having something within us, a certain sin that we don't deal with, and at the most inopportune time, it is going to trip us and we are going to fall flat on our face. You know what it is; it's that little thing you know is within you, that thing no one else knows, and you struggle with it. The writer of Hebrews tells us to deal with that. All Christians are in danger of being tripped up by something within us. It is called a besetting sin, or a tripping sin. Think about stubbing your toe. It hurts when you stub your toe, but more than hurting you physically, when you do it in front of someone and almost trip and fall, it's humiliating and embarrassing. Paul says that as your brother is running his race, as he

is walking with the Lord on his journey, the one thing you don't want to do is be the person who sticks your foot out and trips him. You don't want to be the person running so close to them that you get your feet tangled up with his feet and cause him to fall or lose his balance. In a distance race, when you are in that groove and then another runner gets too close to you and you trip and fall, it takes miles to get back in that groove! That is the image here.

Do Not Be a Stumbling Block

Now these words, "*stumbling block*," mean 'something that causes someone to stumble.' You know, you stick your foot out and down they go. But this word, "*hindrance*," came out of the hunting and fishing world of that day. It is the Greek word, ***scandalon***, from where we get our English word, ***scandal***. It referred to the trigger on the trap that had been set. Once the bait was on the trigger and the animal reached for it, it tripped the trigger. The trigger released a spring and the trap caught the animal. Do you get it? You don't want to be the bait. You don't want to do something that draws attention to yourself in such a way that a believer who is not sure about the matter decides to go for it, and he gets tripped over your actions, and it causes him to stumble.

In this passage about Christian liberty, it's not about what I am free to do; it's about what I am free not to do. As a Christian, I am free to not cause my brother to stumble or get tripped in any way in his walk with Jesus Christ. I submit to you that the highest place you can come in your Christian life is not in great matters of morality or doctrine only, but in matters of conscience. Be that Christian who says I will not because of what my brother believes about that, even though I think it would be perfectly ok for me to do. In these matters, I will perfectly live out the gospel because that is what Christ did; He put others ahead of Himself. I wonder how many times, without knowing, we have tripped up a brother because they saw us in an act that they felt was not correct for a Christian to do, and we didn't even give it any thought. That's one thing, but

another thing is hanging on to a behavior or activity that we know a large group in the Church does not believe is befitting a Christian, but we hang onto it anyway in the name of grace. We have looked down at other people and called them legalists and wish they were free like we were free, and that is not biblical. Christian liberty is not about the freedom to do, it is about the freedom not to do.

Attitude of Love Towards Your Brother

In verse 14, Paul said, *"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."* Here, you get the idea that Paul sides with the strong-minded about food; that in this particular matter of eating, the strong-minded are correct, and it is ok to eat whatever you want because now, in Jesus, there is no food item that is common or unclean. Now, we know from the Old Testament that when God gave the Law to Moses, there were certain animals that were unclean to eat, and certain animals that were clean and ceremonial to eat. The Jews avoided the things that were unclean because they believed it would break fellowship with God, so they would stay away from those things as a command from God. For you see, when we begin to distinguish things as unclean, we know to stay away from them. But in Acts chapter 10, God let Peter in on the secret that God had cleansed all foods, so there is no unclean food item any longer. Now God gave Peter that secret so that he would quit thinking the Gentiles were unclean, and so the Church would take the gospel to the Gentiles. So in the church at Rome, Paul is teaching the strong that he believes they are right; it is ok to eat BBQ! It is ok to enjoy a filet mignon! But if a brother is not sure about BBQ, for him it is unclean. But watch this; I love this! We are always trying to debate people who disagree with us to change to our way of thinking when we believe we are right, agreed? But Paul doesn't spend time in the chapter telling the weak they are wrong and to change their mind, and it's ok to eat BBQ. He talks with the strong-minded people, and he is warning them about their attitude toward people who aren't where they are on matters of conscience.

Now look at verse 15, "*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.*" Love is what governs our liberty. A Christian should have an attitude that says I love my Christian brother or sister more than what I eat or drink. Therefore, my love for you is going to govern my liberties. So if what I am eating is grieving you, I am going to quit eating it.

Paul said, "*By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.*" Didn't Christ die to save people? Then if Christ died to save people, can you imagine brothers and sisters in Christ living lives that destroy people? The word, "*destroy*," here doesn't mean to bring to ruin, meaning they would lose their salvation. It means 'to spoil.' It means that you could actually live your life in such a way that you spoil the Christian walk of another brother by what you do. Can I ask you this question? If Christ died for a brother who was going to be weak-minded towards certain things, can't I miss a few cheeseburgers? Can't I give up my caffeine? How selfish of us to say this is not wrong, therefore, I can do it and it doesn't matter what you believe; it does matter what someone else believes! It matters, because to God, that person was more important than food. How dare you put a food or a drink above a brother or sister in the family?

Look at this next verse, "*So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.*" Don't let your Christian freedom be spoken of as evil! Now get this context; a Jewish person has just come to faith in Jesus Christ and has been set free in Christ, and for the first time in his life, he eats pork! He has ribs for supper! He is at a public restaurant and orders ribs, and three Jewish Christians are sitting at nearby tables. The brother is so excited that he is free and can now eat whatever he wants to eat, but in his eating, he just destroys, spoils, or ruins, fellowship with a fellow brother. And now that brother now says, "I knew this grace stuff wouldn't work! I knew people would hear the message of the cross and believe that because they are forgiven, they can just do anything they want to do!" Hasn't that very thing been charged against the Church of Jesus Christ? For you, it may not be wrong to do, but you just crippled or tripped a brother. You just put a

stumbling block in front of a brother who is really wrestling with the truth. Now he may never fully understand the true freedom he has in Christ because of what a fellow brother put in his path. That brother loved to eat or drink more than he loved people, and Jesus loved people more than He loved eating and drinking.

Righteousness, Peace, and Joy

Verse 17 says, "*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking...*" The Christian life is not about what you can do and what you can't do. That isn't what the kingdom of God is about. The kingdom of God is a matter "*...of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.*" Now, scholars are divided whether this is objective truth or subjective truth. Objective truth means that the kingdom of God is righteousness to those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, because they are brought into a right relationship with God the moment they are justified by faith in Jesus. They now have peace with God, and because of that and the presence of the Holy Spirit, they are just overwhelmed with joy. That happened to each one of us who knows Christ. If you don't know Jesus, you are not right with God. You know that in your soul, you don't have peace with God. When you think about God, you know there is hostility. That is why you run away from Him, and not to Him! When it comes down to it and you are all by yourself, you just don't have that joy from within! But the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus, you will be made right with God, you will be at peace with God, and there is a joy that just cannot be measured! That is objective. But you don't have to choose. Once you have been justified by faith and brought into a right relationship with God, down deep in your heart and soul, there is a desire to be right with your fellowman. You want to live a life of true righteousness that reveals you are right with God, and you want to be at peace with your brother. You don't want to be in a family where there is division. The fruit of that peace and that righteousness is joy, joy that is given by the Holy Spirit of God. That is what the kingdom is. It is not a matter of what we eat, or

drink, or what we don't eat, or what we don't drink. It is righteousness, peace, and joy.

Acceptable to God

Now, look at the next verse, "*Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.*" The believer who is willing to live his life in such a way that he will not put a stumbling block in front of his brother and abstain from things that another believes is wrong, lives a life that pleases God. When others look at the life that believer lives, they can't find anything wrong with his life.

This word, "*approved,*" means 'to be tested and found right.' How many people look at your life and truly say, "Wow, he is a Christian." If you are a strong minded believer that has the attitude that it is ok for you to do certain things, and you do what you believe is right without regard for other believers, you are not living a life that is pleasing to God. Just be honest, when is the last time someone followed you to Church? When is the last time someone truly engaged you in a spiritual conversation? It isn't happening because you do not have the approval of men. The highest life you can live for God is a life that says you will put others and their walk with God before your right to do, or not do, certain things.

- **Build Up the Body**

Look at this next verse, "*So then let us pursue...*" Whoa, go after it! There is the goal line; let's run for it! Let's not let anything stop us from pursuing peace and mutual upbuilding! In the KJV, this word is *edify*. It's a word that is talking about building a building. The picture Paul is using here is the building of the body of Christ. The body of Christ is a building that is being built as a temple unto the Lord. Paul is saying that in my life as a Christian, I should be pursuing a life that brings peace in the body of Christ, even though I have differences of opinion with some of my brothers. I will not be a troublemaker. I will not be the person sticking out

my foot and tripping up a weak-minded brother. I am going to build up the body; I am not going to tear it down.

- **Do Not Tear Down the Body**

Verse 20 says, "*Do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God.*" In the Greek, this verse means that for a plate of meat, how dare you tear down what God's building up! If I had a Jewish friend who was still struggling with a kosher diet as a Christian, would I invite him over to my house for BBQ? Absolutely not! I would be tearing that brother down! If I have friends who have lost everything they have over the choice of a 'beverage,' do you think that is going to be my choice of a beverage as a Christian? Absolutely not!

This word, "*destroy*," here is not the same word translated as destroy in the earlier verse. This word means here to tear down. God is trying to build a body, and what are the strong-minded believers doing? They have made up their mind that it is ok for them to do it, so every time God adds a new believer, they cause one to drop out. Every time God adds to the body the membership tears that person down, all for the sake of a hamburger or a cheeseburger, or a night at a fancy restaurant. How dare we believe that is what Christian liberty is all about! What you are doing may not be wrong, but what matters at this point is not what you or I believe, but what that weaker brother believes; and for him it is unclean. You may think that he ought to be big enough to know that what I do doesn't affect him, but it does affect him. Many believers have entered into a pattern of behavior they did not think was right, but they started it because someone else in the Church was doing it; and they couldn't handle it. Paul doesn't blame that on him, he blames that on you and me. This passage is teaching us as Christians that our life is not about us; our life is about others.

Then Paul said, "*...it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.*" The word for "*wrong*" in the Greek is ***Kakos***. Verse 21 says, "*It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.*" The word for "*good*" in the Greek is ***Kalos***. It means, 'good,

right, acceptable.’ This passage started out with a problem in the Church about eating meat or being a vegetarian, and about observing or not observing certain days as holy, and now Paul broadens it. He has already told us that the kingdom of Heaven is not about eating and drinking, but about righteousness, peace, and joy. Now he says it is good not to eat, drink, or do, anything that would cause your brother to stumble. That is where every one of us ought to desire to be; to live that kind of life that says yeah, I could, but I am not going to. I am not going to because this is not a matter of doctrine, or morality, it is a matter of conscience, and I would not intentionally do anything to trip up my brother or sister in Christ. What would cause your brother to stumble? It is things you eat, things your drink, or things you do. We need to go home and check out our pantry. Do you have any idea what it would do to a weak-minded brother who has been an alcoholic his whole life, and after coming to the faith, you invite him over and you have a bar in your house? What about the brother who just lost his family because of immorality, and you take him out to a movie and you laugh at a film that depicts what destroyed his family?

Between You and God

Verse 22 says, “*The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God.*” Now please listen, this isn’t talking about not sharing your testimony of salvation in Jesus. That is not what this means, you have to keep it in context. It means that some of us who are strong-minded need to keep our mouth shut. We don’t need to air what we believe about certain things because of the brothers and sisters in our church who take a complete opposite view. So just keep that between yourself and God. If you have got to ask the pastor if it is ok to do something, you probably already know the answer. Just keep it to yourself!

Now watch this next part of the verse, “*Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.*” “*Blessed*” are you who already have your mind made up; you are not condemned by what you eat or drink, or what you think or do. That is great! Just don’t try

to push that view on somebody else. It may be ok for you, but it would never be ok for them. So don't try to win a debate, because you will set your brother up to fall.

Be Firm in Conviction

This last verse says, "*Whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats.*" If I see you doing something that I have a doubt about, but I believe it is ok for me to do it because you do it, I condemn myself. I didn't eat or drink from a firm conviction. I just did it because I saw you do it, and you just caused me to fall. Have you ever tried some things that somebody else did and it just didn't sit well with you? I don't want to be the one who causes someone to have a spiritually upset stomach because they tried to eat or drink what I did and it didn't work for them, but actually caused them to fall.

Each of us should desire to bring our life in line with this passage, at home before our wife and kids, and in the community before our coworkers and our fellow peers. We need to live without thinking about ourselves and truly be like Christ and think about others. We need to value people more than what we can or cannot do.