

Responding To The "Grey Issues" In Life

(Romans 14:1-12)

Story: One night there was a woman at the airport who had to wait for several hours before catching her next flight. While she waited she bought a book and a pack of cookies to spend the time. She looked for a place to sit and waited.

She was deep into her book, when suddenly she realized that there was a young man sitting next to her who was stretching his hand toward her pack of cookies lying between them. She sat amazed as he started to eat them one by one.

Not wanting to make a fuss about it she decided to ignore him. The woman, slightly bothered, began to eat her cookies and watched the clock. The young man simply smiled at her as he shamelessly stole her cookies. The woman started to get really angry at this point and thought "If I wasn't such a good and educated person, I would have given this young man a black eye by now."

Every time she ate a cookie, he had one too. The dialogue between their eyes continued and when only one cookie was left, she wondered what was he going to do. Slowly and with a nervous little smile, the young man grabbed the last cookie and broke it in two. He offered one half to the woman while he ate the other half.

Briskly she took the cookie and thought, "What an insolent man! How uneducated! How uncouth! He didn't even thank me for my cookies!" She had never met anybody so crude. She was relieved when she heard her flight announced. She grabbed her bags and headed towards the boarding gate refusing to look back to where that insolent cookie-thief was seated.

After boarding the plane and settling into her seat, she looked for her book which was nearly finished by now. While looking into her bag she was shocked to find her pack of cookies entirely intact. "If my cookies are here," she thought feeling terrible, "those others were his, and he graciously shared them with me." Too late to apologize to the young man. She realized with pain, that it was her who had been an insolent and uneducated cookie-thief, and not him.

How many times in our lives, did we know with certainty that something happened in a certain way, only to discover later that it wasn't true? How many times have we judged other people unfairly based on our own conceited ideas and values?

Intro: Passing judgment on fellow believers is the subject Paul discusses in the next section of Romans. This 14th chapter is divisible into two sections: **First, Don't Judge One Another (vv. 1-12), and second, Don't Cause Your Brother To Stumble (vv. 13-23).** Paul discusses the proper attitude believers are to display towards one another concerning the grey issues in life. Things which are not clearly addressed in the Bible as right or wrong.

I am certain that all of us have discovered the Bible doesn't address every issue we face in life. All of us have faced issues in our lives where we have had to wrestle with the question, ***"Is this right or wrong for me to do?"*** And to make matters worse, we have come to discover that while some Christians agree with us over what we believe is right for us to do; other Christians condemn what we feel is perfectly acceptable to do. All of us face moral and ethical decisions every day. The problem is the Bible does not speak to many of the issues we face.

For example:

1. Is it right or wrong for a Christian to use alcohol ***in moderation***? Can a believer enjoy an occasional cold beer? What about a glass of wine with a meal?
2. Is it right or wrong for a Christian to attend movies? Is it ok if it is rated PG, or PG13? Is it wrong to watch an R rated movie? How does one decide? Christians have different opinions on this subject.
3. Is it right or wrong for a Christian to dance, or listen to secular music?
4. Is it right or wrong for a Christian to live in a nice home, or to drive an expensive luxury automobile?
5. Is it right or wrong for a Christian woman to wear pants to church? Should her attire consist of dresses only? And shouldn't men wear a suit and tie?
6. Should Christian men have short hair? Should Christian women wear a head-covering?
7. Which translation of the Bible should we be using? Advocates of the King James version insist that it is inspired by God. Proponents of the King James only get ugly when anyone disagrees with them.

Well, I think you get the point. Devout Christians disagree over these and a host of other issues. Some think they're right while others think they're wrong. Some believers get so worked up over these questionable or grey issues, that they split their church over them.

This leads us into our study this morning. Paul identifies two different classes of believers in the church at Rome: those who are weak in faith (14:1); and those

who are strong in faith (15:1). He begins by discussing how love is to control our attitude toward one another in regards to the questionable/grey issues in life. Love demands that we do not judge one another, but accept one another (14:1-12). Secondly, love demands that I not use my liberty to cause a weaker brother to stumble (14:13-23), which we will look at next Sunday morning, Lord willing.

Look with me this morning at how to respond to the grey issues in life. Doug Moo, in his commentary on Romans “divides this paragraph into three sections: vv. 1-3, 4-9, and 10-12. The divisions between the sections are marked with similar rhetorical questions, each using the second person singular: ‘Who are you who is judging the servant of another?’ (v. 4a); ‘Why are you judging your brother?’ (v. 10a). . . . The first (vv. 1-3) and the third (vv. 10-12) state in almost identical language the main point of the paragraph: the ‘strong’ are not to ‘despise’ the ‘weak’; the ‘weak’ are not to ‘judge’ the ‘strong’ (cf. vv. 3a and 10a). In the central section, vv. 4-9, Paul provides the theological foundation for these commands: every Christian is a servant of the Lord; and it is to that ‘master,’ and not to any other fellow servant, that the believer must answer.”

Paul begins with an exhortation for believers not to judge one another over the eating of meats (vv. 1-3)

I. Do Not Judge, But Accept One Another (vv. 1-3)

1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. **2** One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. **3** Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.

The focus in these verses is on **the one whose faith is weak**, which appears in the emphatic first position in the sentence. Paul commanded the believers in the church at Rome to accept a weak brother warmly into the church, without passing judgment on them. Commentators are divided over the exact nature of the problem Paul was addressing in this section. However, most take the division between the weak and the strong as applying to the division between Jewish and Gentile Christians. This is supported by the fact that the weaker believers Paul refers to embraced dietary restrictions and observed holy days (vv. 5-6).

Jewish Christians in a pagan city like Rome, continued to observe the distinctions between clean and unclean foods, according to the ceremonial regulations

in the OT Mosaic Code. These Jewish believers were guarding against eating meat sacrificed to pagan idols, as much of the meat came from these sources. In fact, the meat markets were often attached to the pagan temples. These early Jewish Christians adopted a veggies-only policy to guard against defilement. This is what Daniel and his three companions did to avoid eating King Nebuchadnezzar's choice foods (Dan. 1:8, 12, 16). Also, by abstaining from meats altogether, these Jewish Christians were able to avoid eating meat, perhaps pulled pork, served at the churches pot-luck fellowship meals.

Paul bases his exhortation on the principle in verse 2 that one man has faith, or is convinced in his heart that it is alright to eat any kind of meat. But others, who are weak in their convictions, eat vegetables only. **The primary problem is addressed in verse 3**

3 Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.

Both the stronger and the weaker believers were judging one another for not agreeing with their beliefs and practices. The Gentile believers, described as stronger in their faith, were convinced that they were at liberty to eat anything. As a result they were despising and ridiculing their weaker Jewish brothers for not eating meat. Likewise, the weaker Jewish believers were judging and condemning the stronger Gentile believers for eating meat. Both the weaker and the stronger believers were guilty of judging one another. To judge one another over the exercise of personal convictions is to promote evil. God alone is the Judge, and He has accepted all of us in Christ. Paul next presents the theological basis for his commands in verses 4-9

II. Every Christian Is A Servant Of The Lord (vv. 4-9)

4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Another reason judging another believer is wrong is because a domestic servant should be evaluated only by his master, and not by fellow believers. Therefore, Paul concluded, to his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. Even if a believer despises the actions or beliefs of another Christian, God will defend each person.

This same principle holds true today. There are weak and strong believers in

every church. The stronger believers have matured in their faith and understand spiritual truth, and endeavor to practice it in their daily lives. Strong believers support the church in giving, and look for areas to serve in the church and in their community. The weak refer to believers who have not matured spiritually. They have not come to appreciate what God has done for them, and they continue to live life more-or-less like they always have. They don't read their Bibles or pray, therefore, they do not grow spiritually. They don't support the church, and while they may serve occasionally, they are generally lax in their attendance.

Not only are believers not to judge one another, every believer is *to be fully convinced in his/her own mind* concerning the practice of doubtful things, v. 5

5 One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. *Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.*

Another area of disagreement among the believers in Rome, concerned **the observance of special days**. One man considers one day above another, and another man views every day alike. This is a reference to Jewish Christians who observed the Sabbath day as holy. Gentile believers for the most part met on the first day of the week, on Sunday. Apparently some Christians in Rome regarded every day alike or viewed everyday to be lived for the glory of God. The day on which believers gathered to worship the Lord was not of primary importance to Paul. He simply wants every believer to *be fully convinced in his own mind*, that whatever he is doing, he is doing for the glory of the Lord.

6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. Both he who eats, and he who doesn't eat do so for the Lord, and both give thanks to God.

Whatever we do as believers should express our commitment to please the Lord. Paul continues in verses 7-8 that a believers entire life should be lived to please the Lord.

7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; **8** for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

A believer's accountability to the Lord in every area and experience of life is paramount. Every Christian in both life and death is known by the Lord, and is

accountable to Him, and not to other Christians. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

One of the primary reasons for Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection was so that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. God the Father has assigned all future judgment to His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (see Dan. 7:13-14, 27; Rev 20:11-15). Paul's point was that Christ is the Judge, and we are not. To judge others is to put yourself in the place of God. **Paul says, "STOP IT!"**

Paul concludes in verses 10-12 with one final reason why believers are not to judge one another in the area of doubtful things. We will all answer to Christ for how we lived our lives. He is the Lord both of the dead and the living.

III. Every Christian Will Answer To The Lord (vv. 10-12)

10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt?

Christians should not judge one another, or look down on others who don't agree with them over the questionable or doubtful issues in life. We shall all someday stand before the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

For we shall 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 GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.” [Isa. 45:23]

“Everyone will bow in judgment before the Son of God (Isa. 49:13; 45:23; cf. Phil. 2:10-11). Christians will do so at the *bema seat* of Christ following the Rapture (Luke 14:14; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12). Old Testament saints will do so at the Second Coming (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). Unbelievers will do so at the Great White Throne judgment at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). Of course, no one judged at the *bema seat* judgment of Christ will be an unbeliever. The Lord will judge every Christian to determine our faithfulness to our stewardship during our earthly lives. The judgment we receive will be to determine our opportunity to serve Christ in the future (Luke 19:11-27)” [Tom Constable, *class notes on Romans*, DTS].

12 So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Every believer will someday stand before the *bema* seat of Christ and give an account for how he has lived his life. Christ alone is qualified to judge or better to evaluate what each individual Christian has done or hasn't done for Him.

Story: A church member called his pastor following a terrible storm and said, "Pastor, a tornado just destroyed my house and barn."

"I'm not surprised," the pastor replied. "***Punishment for sin is inevitable!***"

"But it destroyed your house too, pastor."

"It did?" said the minister. "The ways of the Lord are beyond our human understanding!"

Conclusion:

Paul's point in this passage, is that we need to quit judging our fellow Christians, who relate to questionable issues differently from the way we do. There is a very strong emphasis on recognizing Jesus' lordship in our lives. Each of us will answer to Him for how we have conducted our Christian lives. The word "Lord" occurs seven times in verses 5-9.

As we close this service, would you ask God to forgive you for judging others who don't agree with you on the practice of some issue? Ask God if what you are doing is ok with Him. May God help each of us to bring our lives into conformity with His will and plan for our lives.

Closing prayer:

Closing song: ***Grace*** by Laura Story