

97-06-01b

We are back from our break now, in Romans chapter 14, and we want to address the issue of our example or our witness. How are we supposed to think about that? Because we are, as we have seen, as we have discussed during our rather lengthy break, we know that it's important what God does on the inside. We've seen that throughout this book.

We've reviewed it in the Word of God time and time again. It's what God does on the inside that counts. And the outward expressions do not constitute our righteousness.

And it has been a conclusion that people draw. Okay, well then I don't need to worry about what's on the outside. I'm taking in the Word of God.

My soul is being transformed. And so I'm going to just freely disregard what anybody thinks. Well, that is going to an extreme.

And we're going to see in this session that there is a consideration that we have to give to our walk, to our example, to our witness. Not only to ours, but also to that of the people around us. We have to make decisions about the people around us.

David said, I'm going to evaluate those in my household. And people who are not up to the standard are going to be purged. I'm not going to tolerate them.

I'm not going to associate with them. Well, wait a minute. What about judge not lest ye be judged? That seems awfully judgmental and harsh.

So, how do we get a grip on lifestyle? Observing our own lifestyle and the decisions we make about that. Observing the lifestyle of people around us and making decisions in that area. Paul says here, receive someone who is weak in faith.

Well, I thought this whole letter was saying you've got to get away from the teachings of these people who don't understand faith. Who think righteousness comes by works. Here they are thinking they're righteous because of what they refrain from eating.

Their eating habits establish their righteousness. And Paul says, don't turn away from them. Welcome them.

Well, where do we draw that line? Well, we can begin by seeing the role that an example plays in the Word of God. What does the Word of God say about the example that people set? And you see this, for example, we have the Old Testament as an example. The author of Hebrews tells us that all of these things have been written as examples for us.

But turn to Jeremiah chapter 17, verse 1. Jeremiah 17, verse 1. God is speaking through the prophet Jeremiah and he says, The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron. With the point of a

diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart and on the horns of your altars. And you'll notice that this sin has an internal consequence.

It creates a scratch or a scar on the heart. And it also has an external consequence. It's graven on the horns of the altar.

The altar is something that's visible to everyone, isn't it? And it's something that's visible to their children. And verse 2 says, Their children remember their altars and their wooden images by the green trees on the high hills. This is cultic, pagan worship on the high places.

The groves that were torn down by some of the kings of Israel during reform times. Josiah and Asa and so forth would go and tear down the groves. This is degeneracy.

This is apostasy. This is evil and wickedness on the part of the parents. And the children observe it.

And God points to the example of the fathers and He says, Look, your children are going to remember this. You can see it in Ezekiel 20, verse 18, where God says, Look at the example of your fathers. I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers.

Do not observe their judgments. Do not defile yourselves with their idols. God makes an issue of the bad example of these degenerate believers, these disobedient and apathetic believers.

He says, You see that? You see what they're doing? You see the way they live and the standards for life that they set? Don't follow that. That's a bad example. So God points the attention of believers to the lives of other believers.

And He says, Here's some bad believers. Now that seems awfully judgmental of God to point out all the failures of these believers and draw people's attention to it, but that's what He does. And He says, Look at that.

Don't do that. That's a bad example. He says, I am the Lord your God.

Walk in my statutes. Keep my judgments and do them. That's been the message of the book of Romans.

Here you've got a bunch of people who have set false standards of righteousness. He says, Don't do that. But now here in chapter 14 of Romans, He's saying, But don't push people away who lack understanding in this area.

We're going to see the basis for deciding where the line of separation is. You can see in Zechariah chapter 1 in verse 4. Zechariah is always kind of a fun book to find. Zechariah chapter 1 in verse 2. Zechariah brings a message to the children of Israel.

The Lord says, The Lord has been very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, Thus

says the Lord of hosts, Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, And I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. Do not be like your fathers.

So they observe the example of their fathers. They know about it, and God says, Think about that. Don't be like that.

To whom the former prophets preached, Saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds. But they did not hear nor heed me, says the Lord. Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? Yet surely my words and my statutes, Which I commanded my servants, the prophets, Did they not overtake your fathers? So they returned and said, Just as the Lord of hosts determined to do to us According to our ways and according to our deeds, So he has dealt with us.

And the point here is that we can perceive the standard of God and whether people have heeded it or not. And we can recognize that and we can say, That's a bad example. We can look at examples of faith and say, That's a good example.

That's what Hebrews chapter 11 is all about. Seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, as he says in Hebrews 12.1. And that cloud of witnesses are the people that he has just recounted in chapter 11. By faith, Abraham.

By faith, Moses. By faith, over and over again, they were sawed in two and all the way down. By faith, they waited for a city whose founder and builder is God.

And by faith, they persevered and looked toward that hope, knowing that without us, they would not be made complete. And they died in faith, not having received the fulfillment of their promises. So God says, These are examples.

You need to look at it. You need to be aware of it. We have examples all around us today.

There are people who do not meet God's standard. And the word of God will overtake them, just as it does here. What does Scripture say? Be not deceived.

God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. And those verses are talking about believers.

You don't reap salvation by sowing. We don't become saved and go to the eternal realms with God forever by what we sow. That's works.

And we're not saved by works. So what must those verses be talking about? Sowing and reaping. That's lifestyle.

That's life choices, priorities. He that sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption. That's the word of God.

And we see examples of that throughout Scripture. And we see examples of it all around us. He that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life that is eternal in quality.

Life that partakes of the divine. Life that transcends this earthly life and goes forward into the eternal future reflecting the glory of God. We sow to the Spirit.

An unbeliever can't sow to the Spirit. And salvation is not expressed in terms of sowing to the Spirit. This is a choice made by believers.

So we have in the Scriptures bad examples. Jesus says in Matthew 23, verse 1, it takes a little bit of time to figure out exactly what He means here. Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples saying the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do. But do not do according to their works, for they say and do not do. How interesting.

These men are bad examples. Their lifestyle does not conform to the Word of God, but they teach the Word of God. And Jesus says listen to them.

Whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do. And He doesn't even qualify and say if you check the Old Testament Scriptures and they're teaching you that, then do it. He says whatever the scribes and Pharisees tell you to do, do that.

But what you see them doing, don't do that. For they say and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

All of their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, greetings in the marketplace, and so forth.

So Jesus says, He qualifies this first by saying they sit in Moses' seat. What does that mean? They are the divinely ordained means of communication. They're the communicators of Scriptural truth.

There aren't copies of the Torah in the hands of people in the towns and villages. They don't have their own Bible that they can go look at. Their communication of the Word of God comes through the scribes and the Pharisees.

That's the avenue of communication of divine truth. And Jesus says pay attention and do that. One of the things that this tells us is we know that communicators are fallible both in their example and in their teaching.

But if you listen to someone and your purpose is to hear and understand the truth of God and you

follow that in good faith, believing that that's what the Word of God teaches, you're on solid ground. It may turn out later that you refine your understanding and you find out that well, what I was taught earlier wasn't a full understanding. Maybe I didn't really have it quite on the mark.

But to the extent that you operated in good faith and were seeking to please God by observing that teaching, that's what God is looking for is the attitude of heart whereby you follow that. There are people who are in denominations and are taught that they need to be baptized by water to be a good believer, to have a witness and so forth. They're taught that and they accept it in good faith.

And they go through baptism because they believe that that's what pleases God. They believe that it's a valid way to express their commitment to a new way of life, to testify to the fact that they understand their salvation and their regeneration and so forth. And when someone undergoes water baptism with that heart, God is pleased.

And it's a good thing. And there's absolutely nothing wrong with it. We can learn as we grow in Christ that this is not an ordinance of the church.

It's not a requirement. You don't have to go back at the age of 78 and be baptized if you never got dunked and so forth. But it's why we do what we do that God is interested in.

And we may be operating on teaching that isn't the pure, undiluted, perfected understanding of God's will and God's Word. But we take what we can find and we want to please God in what we do. And we apply the things that we learn.

And that's what God is looking for. And if we need clarification, if we need refinement, if we need correction in those areas, God will bring it. And that same attitude that caused us to observe that teaching will cause us to observe the refinement and the correction.

And we may go on for a period of years and maybe misunderstand something. And at the right time, when God has built a foundation in our soul, He'll refine that understanding. And we can say, oh, I see that this is really not necessary and this isn't exactly what God is trying to say.

Well, that doesn't mean that once we learn that, what we did in the past is disqualified and worthless and oh my goodness, that wasn't really what it was all about. God is looking for why we do what we do. And if we're living our lives and making our decisions to please Him, it is more important as why we do what we do than the thing itself that we're doing.

That's what Paul is going to point out here in Romans chapter 14. Some people eat meat and some people don't. It doesn't really matter whether the meat is eaten or not.

What counts is why they do what they do. So Jesus says, here are these Pharisees and scribes teaching you. You can bet, how good of a Bible lesson do you think the people of Israel got from the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus said were whitewashed tombstones and canvassed heaven

and earth to make a proselyte and then made Him two-fold the child of hell that they are.

How good do you think that teaching really was? It probably had a high percentage of straw and undigestible, unnourishing teaching. But Jesus said, listen to them and do what they tell you. I find that to be a fascinating statement by the Lord.

Listen to the scribes and Pharisees and do what they tell you to do. But He said, don't live like they live. Don't follow their example.

And then He explains that what they do, they do to be seen by men. He's saying, if they're teaching you these principles as the truth of the Word of God, then take them in and do them because you want to please God, not because you want to be seen by men. And He draws that distinction.

So He says, it's the thoughts and intents of your heart that count. And that's critical to understanding what Paul is telling us in Romans 14 about the example or the lifestyle of people that we accept and that we associate with. Why are they doing what they're doing? This is exceedingly important and you can see this in 1 Corinthians 10.

We're going to see quite a few Scriptures here in 1 Corinthians in short and immediate succession. Look at 1 Corinthians 10. Paul is talking about the people of Israel and the generation that left under the blood of the Passover lamb.

In verse 2, they were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. All ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink. They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ.

But with most of them, God was not well pleased and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. They got distracted by desires.

Do not become idolaters as were some of them. Verse 8, nor let us commit sexual immorality as some of them did and in one day 23,000 fell. Nor let us tempt Christ as some of them also tempted and were destroyed by serpents.

Nor complain as some of them also complained and were destroyed by the destroyer. Verse 11, all these things happened to them as examples and they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages have come. I think earlier I attributed this to the author of Hebrews, but this is Paul talking about the example that we have, in this case a negative example, that is there for our admonition.

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. We have the opportunity to make the Word of God the object of our faith and to look for our righteousness in God's approval based

on that faith. We know that there are many believers who do not do that and they are a bad example.

We see that bad example in Scripture. We see that bad example all around us. We have to make a decision when one of those examples occurs in our immediate periphery.

Do we separate or do we tolerate? Do we associate or do we not even break bread with someone? What is the criteria? How do we know? Here's a good passage to look at. Take a look a few pages back at 1 Corinthians 8. Now concerning things offered to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

And if anyone thinks he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by him. This is one of the great verses for something that's a little off our subject.

But you remember in 1 Corinthians 13 when He says, Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we know in part, we prophesy in part, but then I will know even as I am known. Jesus says through the door, the closed door, to the five foolish versions, depart from Me.

I never knew you. What does it mean to be known by God? We're known for our faith. And if we are faithless, not being known doesn't mean we're not saved.

It means we didn't cultivate a relationship with God. We don't have communion. We don't have fellowship.

We don't have awareness and a conversation that brings intimacy. How is it that we are known by God? How is it that when Jesus sees us, He doesn't close the door and say, I never knew you. This verse tells us, If anyone loves God, this one is known by him.

You can see parallel to this in John 15. He who loves Me will keep My commands. I and My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.

That's being known. That's sharing fellowship and intimacy with God. And it's based on whether or not we love God.

Now, is our salvation based on whether we love God or not? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength and thou shalt be saved. It doesn't say that, does it? But to be known by God is a result of loving God. But back to our subject.

Therefore, in verse 4 of 1 Corinthians 8, concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is no other God but One. Look at verse 7. However, there is not in everyone that knowledge. For some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak, is defiled.

But food does not commend us to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. Now, I would have expected that to be reversed. Why wouldn't Paul be arguing and saying neither if we refrain from eating are we the better, nor if we go ahead and eat are we the worse.

He's just arguing that the meat sitting in front of the idol doesn't make it bad meat. Doesn't it seem like that's backwards? Because his whole point is if you really know the truth about God, then you'll eat the meat and not worry about it. But he turns right around and says if we eat, we're not any better, and if we do not eat, we're not any worse.

Because food does not commend us to God. Even when we understand these things, it's not our action that commends us to God, it's the why, the defiling up in verse 7. Where does that come from? From eating the food? No, it's from violating conscience. It's from going against what you believe to be the divine standard.

Here's a man who thinks that it's against the will and the Word of God to eat meat that's offered to idols, that it dishonors God, and he eats it anyway. He's violated his conscience. He's been inconsistent with himself, and it's sin for him.

Even though someone who understands these things and eats that meat, it's not a sin for him. Two people sit down and take a bite of the same steak. One has committed a sin and one has not.

Because one has done it in faith, understanding that God doesn't care that the meat laid in front of a rock for half an hour. Another man thinks that it's defiled meat and thinks that it's dishonoring to God to eat that meat, and he eats it anyway for whatever reason. Maybe because he wants to conform and not be thought of as a prude.

Maybe because the steak smells good and it's a selfish desire, and he prioritizes himself over the things of God as he understands them. But for whatever reason, he's not doing it in faith. He's doing it in violation of his own conscience.

He's being inconsistent with himself, and that's a sin. He's not doing it in faith. Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours, if you do understand and eat this meat, beware lest your liberty become a stumbling block to those who are weak.

If anyone sees you who have knowledge, in verse 10, eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? Now, he's going to eat because you're eating. What kind of a basis is that? People who get involved in mentoring and personal discipleship need to come to 1 Corinthians 8 because they say, I'm going to model the Christian life. I'm going to mentor.

I'm going to disciple this person that meets with me once or twice a week. And they take a biblical

principle and distort it. They say, I'm going to set an example for your benefit, and I want you to act the way I act because you see me doing it.

Paul says, look here, you're doing a right thing in eating this meat, and you're emboldening the conscience of someone else to eat it because you're doing it, and you're causing him to stumble. You're defiling his conscience because you're making the reason that he eats this meat that it's what you do. Rather than that he understands the principle of the Word of God and is doing it in faith.

It is wrong to set ourselves as an example and to encourage people to do what we do because we did it. They have to do what they do in faith, not in emulation. And this whole idea of mentoring and modeling and discipling is wrong.

It's just flat out wrong. You can't justify it. You can't make a case for it.

We're going to see the example passages where Paul talks about, follow my example. That's what these people typically claim for themselves. And I will tell you by way of preview that unless you think you have the gift of Apostle, you shouldn't be saying what Paul said.

But here's the issue. If anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not his conscience be defiled, be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge, shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died? And that word perish is our old friend Apolluo. The same one that we saw in Romans chapter 9. The vessels of wrath fitted for ruin.

And those are believers. And you can lead a believer in your efforts to make them emulate your example. This is what the Pharisees did.

They tried to set an example praying on the street corners and ashes on their head and so forth. And in setting that example, they wanted approval as being righteous and they wanted others to follow in their footsteps. And that leads to ruin.

Because of your knowledge, shall the weak brother be destroyed for whom Christ died? When you thus sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. And that's as bad as it gets. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat lest I make my brother stumble.

For the sake of a fellow believer, I will refrain from doing something that I know is perfectly fine. It's not worth... If he is liable to follow my example without the faith that undergirds that example, then I won't do that. So we have to be conscious of our example.

We have to be aware of what our example, what kind of an effect it has on other people. But it's the reverse of the issue people make of example today. In a lot of our Christianity today, they make an issue of example and they say... This story I started to tell during the break about a

Christian man who's prominent in gospel music was on this past week and was being interviewed and was telling a story about something that happened at one of his gospel concerts.

He was talking about a big woman who was not attractive and at one point he referred to her as a heifer. Extremely politically incorrect and insensitive and there's no getting around it. That's not a good thing to do.

But the great inflammation that followed that amongst all the people who heard it had to do and was justified by well, what are unbelievers going to think? What's this going to do for the cause of Christ that someone who's an avowed Christian is so insensitive and uncouth and uses this unkind term talking about a fan or whatever that ran up to him. And then there were others who leaped to his defense and said, you know, he's what you see is what you get and he doesn't realize that this is in some people's eyes a derogatory term. There's a lot of justification that goes on.

But the point is, we have to be aware of our example. It does make a difference. Paul says here, if your example is going to cause someone to stumble, then don't do that thing even though you know that it's okay.

Look at 1 Timothy 4, verse 12. Paul is talking to someone who is going to be prominent in the church, to a pastor, Timothy. And he says in 1 Timothy 4, let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers.

He says set an example, be an example. Well, maybe we should mentor and model and so forth. But what kind of example does Paul say here? Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

Until I come, give attention to reading, exhortation, to doctrine. Don't neglect your spiritual gift. Meditate on these things in verse 15.

Give yourself entirely to them that your progress may be evident to all. So Paul says, Timothy's example is important. He's a pastor.

He is observable by others. What kind of an example is he to be? Is he to be a Pharisaical example? Is he to be an example that causes others to stumble? You can't make someone stumble if you are an example in the areas of love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. He's basically saying, grow, and as you grow, what God has done on the inside is going to manifest itself in what you do and that is an example to others.

Devote yourself to the word, reading, exhortation, doctrine. Meditate on these things. Give yourself entirely to them.

That's a worthy example. And you can't cause anyone to stumble by dedicating yourself to the

things of God and to pleasing God. He says the same thing to Titus.

It's interesting that both of our pastor letters, the letters to Timothy and the letters to Titus, emphasize this point. Titus 2.7-8 In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works, in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed having nothing evil to say of you. So there are things that are not in the category of doubtful things.

Eating meat offered to idols, that's in dispute. Some people think it's okay and some people don't. So Paul says, if it's going to cause anyone problems, then refrain.

It's no longer a doubtful thing for you. It's a thing to be avoided. But there are some things about which there is no question.

No one can say anything evil of you if you make yourself someone who shows integrity in doctrine, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech, which I would say my little preceding example, that's not really sound speech. Some people say, well, that's okay. That's just the way this person is.

I mean, he uses this term affectionately of his own wife and so forth. And people justify it. But it's in doubt.

There are people who misunderstand that, who don't know the person. These 40 million TV viewers that saw this comment don't know this person the way his intimates and associates do. And for them, that can be a stumbling block.

Well, if it makes people stumble, it's wrong. And he shouldn't use that vocabulary, regardless of how innocent or how affectionate it may be. And that's what this says.

There are some things about which there is no dispute. They're not doubtful. And he says, be an example in those areas so that if there's an opponent, he will have nothing evil to say of you.

Hebrews 13.7, we won't turn there, but you might make a note of it. The author of Hebrews says, follow the faith of those who have the rule over you. Observe the faith of those who are examples, and do likewise.

Consider the end of their lifestyle. Consider the fact that he who sows to the Spirit reaps of the Spirit life everlasting. If you look at their example and see that God blesses and God is pleased and that God uses that to bear fruit and to reflect His glory, that ought to be a motivation.

You can see that in the Scriptures, and we also see it in believers around us. James 5, verses 10 and 11. James says, look at the prophets.

Look at Job. They are an example of suffering with patience. James says, if you find yourself

suffering, think about the example of people who have suffered in faith.

The author of Hebrews, of course, does the same thing in Hebrews chapter 11. He says, think about the example. Think about the witnesses.

And remember the produce, the fruit, the end of their lives. In 1 Peter chapter 3, Peter says, remember the holy women of old? They were an example of submission. They were an example of faith.

They were an example to younger women. And he says, you younger women need to take them as an example. Two chapters later, in 1 Peter 5, verse 3, he says, your leaders in the church, your faithful leaders, they are examples.

Should be examples. But now, turn to Galatians chapter 2, because here's where we get our contrast. Here's where we get our balancing principle.

One of the things I have observed in Scripture is anytime you find a principle, a doctrine that is taught, you will always find at least one other principle or doctrine that helps you balance that and keep from taking it to an extreme. And yes, we are to think about example, and we are to be tolerant of those who err out of ignorance or who haven't grown to the point of understanding the way to take doubtful things. But if you look at Galatians chapter 2, here we have a case of someone eating and refraining from eating and so forth, and yet it's a completely different situation.

Paul is talking in Galatians 2 about his association with Peter in Antioch. When Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face because he was to be blamed. For before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles.

He would eat Gentile food. He remembered the vision. The sheet let down.

Take Peter, kill and eat. For what God has declared clean that no man call defiled. So he was to eat with the Gentiles.

But when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. When I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, if you being a Jew live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live like Jews? Now, let's think about this for a minute.

Peter is there in Antioch. There are Gentile believers around who have come to faith in Christ. Peter goes and eats with them, has this food that is a doubtful thing.

There are Israelite Christians, Jewish Christians who think, well, the law is still in effect. You

shouldn't be eating bacon and ham and you shouldn't be violating the dietary code of the Mosaic law. But Peter is eating with these Gentiles and everything is going along fine.

But then some of these Jerusalem believers come who, for them, this is a doubtful thing. Oh no, still got to observe the restrictions of the Mosaic law on diet. Well, ask yourself this question.

Isn't Peter doing exactly what Paul says in Romans 14? Well, if me going and eating with these Gentiles is going to cause them to stumble, I'll just refrain and I'll not partake of these foods unless I cause my brother to stumble. Seems like Peter has a case here, doesn't he? Well, what does the verse say in Galatians 2.12? Before certain men came from James, and we know James was the head of the Jerusalem church where they were still stuck on the law in a lot of ways, he would eat with the Gentiles. But when they came, he withdrew and separated himself.

Why? Fearing that he would cause them to stumble? It was out of love for them and a desire to not harm them in the pursuit of the faith? No. Why did he refrain? Fearing those who were of the circumcision. He feared them.

He feared their opinion. He didn't do this out of faith. He did it out of fear.

He did it out of peer pressure. He did it out of a desire to not be condemned by people around him. It isn't what we do, it's why we do it that God is looking at.

That's the issue. What is your motivation? Peter could make a case. He could say, hey, you know, I got a copy of this letter to the Romans that Paul wrote and see right here it says, you know, I can refrain if these people who like to refrain are around.

It doesn't wash because that's not his motivation. He's not worried about whether they stumble. And in fact, by refraining, he has caused many more believers to stumble.

And Paul points it out. Look at verse 14, when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel. Remember our study of what gospel means? This doesn't have anything to do with salvation, does it? To eat or to not eat.

But he says they weren't being straightforward. When they refrained from eating meat because these legalistic Jews came around, they distorted the truth of the gospel. This is the gospel of lifestyle.

This is the teaching about how to live as a Christian. And that's encompassed in that term gospel. They were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel.

I said to Peter, if you being a Jew live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? You're confusing the issue of grace. You're confusing the issue of the law. You're confusing the issue that this book of Galatians and the book of Romans are written to address.

Your righteousness doesn't come by what you do. It doesn't come by keeping the law or any other human system of righteousness. It comes by whether or not God looks in your soul and sees faith.

And you're not doing this in faith. You're doing this out of fear. And you're confusing new believers who are Gentiles who suddenly think, well, my goodness, Peter is not eating this meat anymore.

I wonder if I really should start paying attention to the law of Moses and its dietary restrictions. It muddies the water. Peter's example is bad and Peter's example is causing people to stumble when he refrains.

And that's the issue. Why do you do what you do? What is the effect on fellow believers? And that's what we have to evaluate. You can see this in 1 Corinthians 9. Verse 22.

1 Corinthians 9.22. Now this passage, which has been confusing in times past, starts to make sense. Look at verse 19. This is 1 Corinthians 9.19. For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win the more.

To the Jews I became as a Jew that I might win Jews. He doesn't become like the Jews so that he won't be repudiated by them. He doesn't become like a Jew because he's afraid of them.

That's what Peter did. Why is he acting like a Jew in this case? Because he's afraid of those that he might win them. As to those who are under the law, as under the law.

There are times when Paul may refrain from eating this food, but it's not out of fear. It's out of faith. It's out of a desire to build up and to concentrate on the essential issues and not distract someone.

How can he talk about the truth of Jesus Christ when someone is in shock because he ate a piece of ham? Paul does not flaunt his freedom and flaunt his knowledge and win a battle and lose the war because he's distracted someone. He's focused on their benefit and it's more beneficial for them if at that time he doesn't make an issue out of diet until they have gotten the basics under their belt. So it's why he does this that counts.

That I might win those who are under the law. To those who are without the law, I act as though I am without the law. I'm not without the law toward God, but under law toward Christ.

I don't engage in sin, if they're engaging in sin. I still recognize my responsibilities as a believer, but I don't make an issue out of things that are not important. So that I may win those, my motivation is to be of benefit, to bring them to Christ, to bring them to God, and I don't want to throw up any stumbling blocks.

That's the reason Paul didn't accept support from a lot of the churches. It was his right as an apostle and he was owed it by the churches, but he never made an issue out of it because he

didn't want to obscure the gospel. To the weak I become as weak, that I might win the weak.

And that should be our motivation. When we are sensitive about our example and about what we do or refrain from doing, our motivation needs to be faith, a desire to be pleasing in God's sight and to be usable by God, to be of benefit to someone, not to flaunt our freedom or to raise issues that cause strife and distraction. I have become all things to all men that I might by all means deliver some.

So that's the issue. And when we come back here to Romans chapter 14, and we'll conclude with some more passages of Scripture next time, but we can already see that when Paul says in Romans chapter 14, receive one who is weak in the faith, but not for disputes over doubtful things. We don't receive them so that we can corner them and try to change their mind about these doubtful things.

We receive them because our desire is for their benefit. We want to be available and we want to not make an issue out of minor things and be available for God but we want to make an issue out of major things. And we do what we do to be a blessing and to be a benefit, not to create strife and division.

And as long as we see the potential for someone to respond, someone who's interested and who's seeking, who's willing to listen, that's a great opportunity. And we don't turn someone away because they haven't got everything figured out or because they're still struggling with issues in their soul. That's a terrible thing.

And so we can major in the minors and lose some great opportunities and actually be disapproved by God. So that's the issue that we see here. And we'll pick up here in the early part of Romans chapter 14 next week.

But it's a wonderful thing to keep in mind that what we do does make a difference. And our guiding principle in whether we associate or whether we separate is what is beneficial? What is going to produce the greatest good in the plan of God? Continuing an association or separating? We may continue an association like David. It's going to lead us into defilement.

It's going to result in bad things. That's a time to break an association. But as long as there's the potential for benefit, that's our motivation.

Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word. We thank You for its potential for application to guide us in the daily decisions we make in life, the priorities that we set, and the relationships that we engage in.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will give us discernment and the ability to see the application of these things in our daily decisions and actions. We pray that as a result, we will be pleasing in Your sight. We will accurately understand the issues, the things that are important and the things

that are unimportant in each of the situations that we face.

And that our priorities and our conclusions that we draw as we attempt to apply these things will be pleasing in Your sight and will reflect Your glory and will bear the fruit that You desire to bear in our lives. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.