

97-06-15a

As we prepare to worship the Lord this morning together in fellowship in the study of his word, let's open with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the privilege we have of gathering and spending time looking at the truth of your word and enjoying the blessing of fellowship with you and the ministry of your spirit. We thank you for fellow believers who have an enthusiasm for your word and a desire to have a greater understanding and to make progress in fulfilling your purpose for us in this life.

We pray that our time spent this morning will be glorifying to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that our examination of this portion of your word will be edifying and will build us up and bring us closer to the example and the image of our Savior. We pray that as a result we will fulfill your purpose and be pleasing in your sight.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 10.

1 Corinthians 10, beginning in verse 23. 1 Corinthians 10, 23 and following parallels in thought the portion of scripture we find ourselves looking at this morning in Romans chapter 14. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, 23, All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful.

All things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake.

For the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness. If any of those who do not believe invite you to dinner and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, This was offered to idols, do not eat it, for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake.

For the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness. Conscience, I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I gave thanks? Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Give no offense, either to the Jews, or to the Greeks, or to the church of God. Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. This gets a little convoluted there in the middle about the meat offered to idols and so forth, but the overriding principle that Paul is expressing here is clear.

The criteria by which we judge the things that we do in areas that are not covered by commandments. We have commandments that tell us specific things that are always wrong. It's always wrong to murder.

It's always wrong to break a promise, to break an oath, to break a covenant with someone else, such as the covenant of marriage through adultery, whether mental or physical. It is always wrong to do things that are expressly labeled as sin in the scripture. But there are many other areas where there is no specific scriptural prohibition.

For example, how much TV should we watch? Well, you can't turn to 2 Philistines 3.5 where it says, Thou shalt watch no more than three hours of TV a day, or no more than an hour and a half, or you can only watch educational TV, and then only if it's not an evil program that expresses bad thinking and so forth. We don't have guidance in the area of television. We don't have much guidance in the entire area of entertainment.

How much time should we spend in the pursuit of amusement, whether it's experiences at amusement parks or video games or browsing the internet or whatever it might be? What does the scripture say about that? It doesn't give us any specific guidance. There is a broad range of activity and things that consume time and life over which scripture makes no specific claim, no specific guidance. And these have been called in the past doubtful things or just things that are not either labeled as sin or expressly labeled as good.

And it's amazing, the more you think about it, the wider this category becomes. Most of what we do in life is not really covered by commandment. So, how do we operate in these areas? Well, we have discussed this in the past, and it's a wonderful thing to keep in mind in any area of life.

You can try to operate by rules or you can try to operate by principles. And we find, both in theory and in practice, that operating on principle is superior to operating on rules. Wouldn't it be nice if our court system could function on the basis of principles? Our legal system and our court system functions on the basis of rules.

And that's why our legal code and our law has blossomed and expanded and fills book after book after book. We have not only law, but we also have legislation at the federal level and the state level. We have case law that guides the determinations of the courts in trying to interpret the law.

But it mushrooms and it blossoms. Why? Because every time you have a new situation, you have to refine and make application of the rule. And there are so many cases where the rule doesn't seem to quite fit or doesn't seem to be clear enough.

And this is the problem that Israel ran into in trying to apply the law of Moses. The law of Moses was a set of rules, a set of procedures, a set of rituals that were the expression of principles. But people ignored the principles and simply tried to apply the rules.

And there were so many cases that came up where the rule didn't cover it, didn't apply. And so they had to amplify and expand and add to. And pretty soon they had much more that had been added by men than they ever had from the mouth of God himself.

Well, the wonderful thing is if we learn principles, if we understand the things that affect our priorities and our purpose and our goal in life, these can apply anywhere. This is the difference between having a rule and having common sense, between memorizing a procedure and truly understanding what's going on. We find this out in school as well.

In fact, I tried this. I got into some math classes where I had no idea what they were talking about, what was going on. I got into calculus and differential equations and some of these things.

And I had no background. I had no foundation for those things. And in order to attack a problem and arrive at the correct solution so that I could get a grade, I had to simply memorize procedures.

I had to memorize rules. When you see an equation in this form, these are the steps to go through. Well, that was fine for any of the problems that fit my rule and fit my procedure.

But if they threw me a curve and here's a problem that I hadn't memorized a procedure for, I was hopelessly lost. Well, over the course of grinding through two or three semesters of calculus, by the time I reached my third semester, the light started to dawn and I began to understand the reality of what I was doing and what these equations represented. And the truth of it and the reality of it started to sink in.

And then, once I understood that and I understood the principles that guided the solution of these equations, I could take a new problem and solve it because I understood the principle and I didn't necessarily need a rule. Well, this is the progress that we have made in human history and in the plan of God. God began with rules and began with codes in the Old Testament, but now our lives are guided by principle.

This passage in 1 Corinthians 10 and its parallel in Romans 14 is an expression of principle. Is there a rule about eating meat offered to idols? It would be so simple if Paul simply said, never eat meat offered to idols or always eat meat offered to idols. The problem is that's just a representative situation.

What about doing business with someone who is an idolater? What about having a brother-in-law or a cousin or someone in the extended family who is an idolater? Should we associate or not associate? Should we sit down to the same table with someone that we know is involved in some form of idolatry? What if someone manufactures idols for a living? This is how they feed their family and they're a wonderful person, but maybe they make shovels and making shovels is an honorable profession, but some of these shovels are used in idol worship to shovel the ashes into the fire that burns human sacrifices or something. Well, how do we treat this person? You see, we'd have to start expanding the rules and try to cover this. We have this problem today.

People in a lot of churches say, well, I wonder if it's pleasing to God to own a liquor store or to make fertilizer that's used by tobacco farmers. This man's main business is making fertilizer, but

his main customers are tobacco farmers, and tobacco farmers make tobacco, and tobacco goes into cigarettes. Oh, we know that cigarette smoking is a terrible, evil thing.

So we would have to start developing more and more rules, and where would we be? The wonderful thing in this age is that we learn principles, and the principles guide us anywhere, and that's what Paul is expressing here. He says it isn't a matter of making a rule. Always eat meat offered to idols.

Never eat meat offered to idols. He says look at the principle. What is the result? What is the benefit or the harm to others? Because our guiding principle is love.

Our guiding principle is being willing to sacrifice our own desires, our own pursuits, perhaps our own stimulation or our own happiness for the benefit of someone else, to keep from harming someone else, to help build someone else up, and that's our guiding principle, and that applies in any case. Is it right or wrong to eat meat offered to idols? Paul says, well, look around and see if it's harming someone. If it does no harm to another, and if it doesn't violate a command of God, then feel free.

If it doesn't violate a command of God, he quotes the scripture, the earth is the Lord's and all its fullness. So it isn't a problem in God's eyes to eat this meat. It's meat that God made.

Whatever we eat with thanksgiving is blessed. But if it is going to cause someone problems, if it's going to confuse them, if it's going to slow them down, if it's going to create an obstacle to their understanding of God's plan and their growth, now eating this perfectly legitimate thing becomes a problem. There is nothing inherently wrong with drinking an alcoholic beverage.

However, it may cause someone else to stumble, and it may cause us to stumble if we don't know when to stop or if we are unable to stop for whatever reason. Some of us are physiologically more susceptible to the effects of alcohol than others. And if it causes us to stumble, then we refrain.

If it causes others to stumble, then we refrain. Someone may have no problem with alcohol, but if they are a pastor or a teacher of the word of God or if they are prominent as a Christian and are identified as such both by fellow believers and unbelievers, that may cause people a big crisis of conscience. What would you think if you saw a film of Billy Graham sitting down and having a martini with an olive floating in it? What would that do to his ability to communicate the gospel? There is nothing wrong.

There is nothing sinful about a martini with an olive floating in it. But if Billy Graham sips one on national TV, it would create a firestorm of controversy. And so even though that's legitimate, that's something that Billy Graham does not do.

That's the principle that guides us. Now, people will justify some forms of sin and say, well, this

isn't hurting anyone. People will get some drugs and say, well, this is stimulating to me and I'm not hurting anyone.

I lock myself in my room and get higher than a kite for half a day and I'm not hurting anyone. Well, yes, you are. You're hurting yourself.

And each of us has as much value as the next. And God's whole purpose is that none of us be caused to stumble, that none of us be distracted from the plan and the purpose of God. And to do something that interferes with our ability to think, to do something that indicates that we don't understand where true happiness comes from, we think, well, it's the signals that I get from my nerves that make me happy.

And if I can take this drug or abuse this substance, this is going to make me feel better. That's an indication that we don't understand what life is about. We don't understand what happiness is.

We don't understand that we are not our own. We have been bought with a price. Jesus Christ purchased us with his blood.

And we don't belong to ourselves. We belong to him. And our goal is to please him, not please ourselves.

The irony of that is that when we abandon the pursuit of our own happiness and seek to please God, we find that we are happy beyond our wildest dreams. We're happy beyond any ability we would ever have to please ourselves because God, as a gift, gives us peace and joy that is indescribable. It's inexpressible.

And it's eternal in its nature. It partakes of the divine. So this is a principle.

And in this age, we don't live by law. We live by principle. The principle of love.

The principle of grace. God's dealing with us is in grace, according to the principle of grace. And God treats different ones of us differently.

Two different believers can commit the same sin. And God will discipline one differently than another. Why? Because God's not operating according to law.

God is operating according to grace. God evaluates us based on what we are responsible for. How much do we know? We saw last week that there is a sin that is committed in ignorance.

And God is merciful. Paul the apostle says that the sins that he committed were done in ignorance. And for that reason, God showed mercy to him.

The law of Moses, even in the Old Testament, made this principle clear by saying there is a sin that is done in ignorance, and it's a sin, and it requires a sacrifice. But there is also a sin that is done willfully, with full knowledge that it's a sin. And the penalty for that is much more severe.

So here we have the idea expressed that we have to pay attention to what kind of an effect our life has on other people. Even when we do something that's perfectly legitimate. It's not sinful, it's not wrong in God's sight.

It can be wrong in God's sight if it hurts someone else. If it deflects us personally from a life that pleases God. So we come back to some of these things we mentioned earlier.

What about television? What about entertainment? What about the Internet, or video games, or movies, or any of the other things that surround us and attract our attention in this life? What about social life? Some people live for social life, and they can't wait to get through the day so that they can be with their friends, and spend time in conversation, and so forth. Well, the guiding principle is who are we living to please? Are we living to please other people? Are we trying to get them to have a good opinion of us? Are we living to please ourselves? Are we trying to find stimulation and distract ourselves from any feeling of misery, or any feeling of unhappiness, or any feeling of boredom that we might develop? Or are we living to please the Lord? You can't go wrong if you strive in everything you do to please the Lord. To look at God and say, I wonder if God is happy with this use of my time.

Would God rather, if God were here, if the Lord Jesus Christ were sitting here in the room, how much TV would He want me to watch? Would He suggest that perhaps there's a better way to spend my time in view of eternity, in view of preparing for function, both in this life and the next, in opportunities to bear fruit? How often should we go to church? How often should we attend Bible class? How often should we read a book or hear a tape? There are those of us who at times have gotten so interested, and for whatever reason have gotten so caught up in the study of the Word of God, that we can actually do that to excess. It isn't pleasing to God to spend all of our time with our nose in the Bible and ignore responsibilities that we have to our employer. There are people who take their Bible to work and say, well, I'm a Christian, and I'm pleasing God by reading my Bible.

Not if it's done on company time. The company doesn't pay us, and we are not being good servants to that master if we misuse our time. And that's not the time to study the Bible on the clock, when someone is paying us to do a job.

We do our job heartily as under the Lord, and our job doesn't call for us to read the Bible. Many problems such as prayer in the public forum, prayer at work, prayer in school, and so forth, would be non-issues if we simply applied this principle. What are we at school to do? When we gather for a public assembly, what are we trying to express? What testimony are we trying to give? It is appropriate that our Congress opens every session with prayer, that our Supreme Court has the Word of God displayed on the wall.

These things are important, and they express the foundation of our nation, and there's nothing

wrong with that. But some people take this to an extreme and try to foist their faith on people who have no appreciation and no capacity for it. So these principles are very valuable, and we have to understand that that's what God is trying to teach us, is principle, not law.

The wonderful thing about a principle is that it's flexible, and it can be adapted and applied in virtually any circumstance. So we're learning principles. If you'll turn with me now to Romans chapter 14, we will resume here in an examination of this principle, which is the principle of love, the principle of doing what is right.

Now, if you have studied the book of Romans as we have, from chapter 1 all the way up to the present, what is this book really about? This would be a good pop quiz question. Wouldn't it be great if someone could ask us about any book of the Bible, and we could say, well, this is what that book's about. Somebody brings up the book of Hosea.

What's that book about? Well, most of us would throw up our hands and say, well, I would have to go back and look. I don't really know what Hosea is about. What is the book of Romans about? What is this book? What's the theme of the book? What's the main point that Paul makes in this letter that he wrote to the Roman believers? Well, the main point of this letter, as we have seen, is that righteousness comes by faith.

God is pleased with us when he looks inside our soul and sees that what we are thinking and what we are doing is done out of a desire to please him and out of looking at his word and trying to be obedient to it. That's the message of this entire letter. It's a 16-chapter book in the New Testament.

And every chapter, everything that Paul says in here is support and explanation and illustration of that central theme. It isn't what we do that pleases God. It's what we think.

What we think is going to be expressed in what we do. And this is what you find in James. Remember, James says, Faith without works is dead, and show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

And that's the balancing principle. We can't just say, well, I'm heavenly minded, and so God is pleased, and then our actions don't reflect that. If our thinking is straight, our actions are going to reflect right thinking.

But you can think about this. Most churches today, not this one, but most churches, have a building. It's got a steeple.

It's got a parking lot. It's got a couple of big glass doors in the front. People come in, file down the aisle, and go into some pews, usually wooden pews.

They sit down in the pew. The place fills up or has whatever number of people are coming that Sunday, and at a certain point in the service, ushers will come forward, and there's a prayer to

bless the offering, and then the plates are passed. And money is contributed into these plates that are passed.

And it's collected, and it's used for the functions that that church performs to support its ministries and to pay its utility bills and so forth. Now, let's imagine in this church that two people are sitting side by side. They don't know each other.

They've filed in. They're sitting in the same pew. Here comes the plate being passed down the row there.

One usher at one end, another usher at the other end. Here comes the plate. Believer A has reached into his billfold and pulled out a \$20 bill.

He drops it into the plate. Believer B gets handed the plate, takes his \$20 bill, and drops it in the plate. Hands the plate on.

The usher picks it up, and they go on with the service. Two believers have reached into their pocket, grabbed the \$20 bill, and contributed it to the church. Now, is that righteous? Is that a good deed? Is that something with which God is pleased? It's the identical same action by two believers.

If we had a rule that said contributing money to the church is a good thing, then we could easily say both believers have done a good thing. Well, let's examine the hearts of these two believers. Believer A has come to the church and sat down.

He notices that as the plates are being passed and the pew is up in front of him. This is one of the reasons why when we had a church this way, I had them start at the back and pass the plate forward so people couldn't see what other people were doing. But Believer A looks and he sees, boy, I hear the plink of change into the plate.

It looks like everybody's doing that. If I just pass the plate and don't put something in, I think people might wonder about me. They might think I'm not very spiritual or that I'm not very appreciative.

People are going to notice if I don't put something in this plate. I see people seated on each side of me and I'd better reach in and put something in the plate or people are going to wonder about me. I've done several bad things this past week.

If I drop something in the plate here for the church, God will take that into account when He looks at these bad things that I've done. I won't feel so guilty. I've done some bad things, but here I'm doing a good thing.

This is what's going on in Believer A's heart when he reaches in and grabs that \$20 and drops it into the plate. He passes the plate to Believer B, who's sitting right next to him, who has also

pulled out a \$20 bill. But Believer B has been sitting there thinking, I really appreciate this church.

The pastor is faithful and I learned the Word of God here. I appreciate so much having a place to come with fellow believers and worship and learn the Word of God and express my heart to the Lord and be filled with the bounty of His blessings and fellowship and teaching and hearing music and so forth. I know this church not only benefits me, but it benefits a lot of other people.

It's got missions outreach. It supports people who do things that I think are pleasing to the Lord. I want to see this church continue.

I appreciate it. I think it's a privilege by putting some money into the plate here, I can participate. I can be a part of these things.

Even though I can't necessarily go out and do some of these evangelistic works and some of these ministries, I can help in this way and in this way participate and hopefully in a small way be a blessing to some other people in this way. That's what's going on in his heart. Now, looking at what's going on in the heart, which believer has done a righteous thing? Well, it's pretty easy.

It's Believer B, isn't it? Because man looks on the outward appearance, the Lord looks on the heart. In a way, this is the same parable that Jesus told. When He was teaching about two men praying on the street corner.

And He said, here's Believer A, praying on the street corner saying, Lord, I thank You that I'm not like other men and that I'm wearing these righteous robes of a Pharisee and that I have arisen to this lofty spiritual status and people recognize me as being a wonderful, holy man. And then He says, here's Believer B, who's got his head bowed and is beating his chest saying, Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. God, each one of them is praying, just like each of these believers is putting money on the plate.

But it isn't what we do that determines whether we're being righteous or being unrighteous. It's what we think. And so, it's a much higher responsibility that God has given us in this age to look at what we think.

Why are we studying the Word of God? Among other things, the Word of God is a critic, a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart, it tells us over in 2 Timothy. Well, that's what counts. What is our thinking? What is our motivation in the heart? Why do I spend time with this person? Am I desiring to be beneficial to them even if it costs me something? Or am I trying to manipulate them? Am I trying to control them? Am I getting some stimulation, some personal satisfaction out of bending them into a particular path that I think is right? Or am I trying to impress them? Or am I trying to get their good opinion? Whatever.

God is looking at that on a constant, minute-by-minute, day-by-day basis. So, it isn't what we do that counts. It's why we do it.

Now, that thinking, if it's right, is going to express itself. And we are going to do good works. And those good works are meaningful inasmuch as they reflect good thinking.

But that's what this book of Romans is about. Paul says righteousness, pleasing God, having a life that counts, having a life that has a future with God, having a life that's going to reflect God's glory now and in the future, that's the only thing that really counts. Anything else we do in this life, we can build buildings, we can build monuments, we can become famous, we can be appreciated by a lot of people, but that's all going to go up in smoke.

The things that count, the things that are eternal, are based on pleasing God. And Paul says if you want to please God, live a life that reflects a desire to please Him. Live a life that's built on trusting God.

Righteousness comes by faith. Well, now we've come to the practical section of this book. Paul has spent many chapters teaching us and explaining why righteousness comes by faith and not by works.

He's explained all that. Now he's saying here's some ways that this comes into application. And he has not switched subjects at all.

And so here in chapter 14, he says, Receive one who is weak in the faith. Well, here's one of the difficulties in living with other people and especially living with other believers. Some of us pay attention to the Word of God and we learn and we grow and we come to understand some things.

We understand that righteousness is by faith and we're living in that light. We try not to let the opinions of other people determine what we do. But, here's somebody else who doesn't understand that.

And they're caught up in things that we know better. They're out here, they're dropping money on the plate because they're feeling guilty or because somebody up in the pulpit put pressure on them and said, you know, if you look at our financial report for last month, we were way down. And you really need to give and so forth.

And they're doing it out of pressure or they're doing it out of guilt or they're doing it out of thinking that by doing this they're going to be making God happy. And it's sort of tit for tat. I'll pay God and He'll give me a blessing kind of a thing.

Well, we know better. And so we look at this believer. What are we likely to do? Well, we are likely to judge them.

We're likely to penalize them and say, well, you obviously don't understand. I'm in a lofty spiritual pedestal here and you're down there. You haven't learned anything.

You're making big mistakes and I don't want to have anything to do with you. We do this. We look

at people in churches.

We look at people on TV. We look at people who are doing obvious wrong things and we say, oh, they are so ignorant. They're just babies.

And we sort of make ourselves feel better when we look at them and see the mistakes that they're making. Well, Paul says don't do that. He says receive believers who are weak in the faith but not for the purpose of arguing.

Sometimes we receive people and we say, well, I'll straighten them out. I'll explain all of this to them. I will give them the truth that I have accumulated in my soul and I'll get you straightened out.

Come under my wing and let me tell you how you need to be living. And he gives the example here in verse 2 that we saw over in Corinthians. One believes he can eat anything.

The other one, who is weak, eats only vegetables. This is another diet thing. Over in 1 Corinthians 10, we saw them worrying about whether a piece of meat had been in front of a rock for a little while or not.

Here, someone is observing, they're vegetarians and they don't eat meat at all. Paul says in verse 3, let not him who eats despise him who does not eat. The one who's eating, he's more mature, isn't he? He understands that God has made everything.

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And he says, we do this today. Why do some people become vegetarians today? They say, oh, look at what science says.

Look at all the cholesterol in that red meat. Look at all of the bad things in this food. This is harmful.

This can give you cancer. This can clog your arteries and do this, that, and the other. And sometimes we have more faith in science than we have in the Word of God.

What does the Word of God say about food? It says all things are good for food if they are taken with thanksgiving. And if we look to God and we're grateful for the food that he has given us, now obviously we pay attention and we don't eat things that we know are going to harm us. Some of us have medical conditions.

Some of us have very good and prudent reasons for cutting back on cholesterol and so forth. But having been prudent and having used some common sense, we also recognize that God has given us these things for food. And if we take them in faith and if we trust God for these things and if we're grateful to God for these things, they're fine for food.

So we understand that. And it's easy to get a superior attitude and look down on someone who

doesn't understand that and say, oh, you poor ignorant person. You're so immature.

You're so weak and so forth. And we can wind up having contempt for them. This is not just in the area of food.

It can be in the area of anything. A lot of us who have learned the Word of God over time look at believers who are in denominational churches and we see some of the things they do and we say, oh, these poor slob. They're so far behind the curve.

They just don't know anything about the Word of God. The simplest things in the Word of God. They just don't understand it.

And we tend to look down our nose and have contempt or we tend to judge one another. Paul says don't do either one of those. The one who eats, let him not despise the one who does not eat.

Contempt is the temptation for someone who knows better to get an attitude of arrogance and superiority. That's what we have to watch out for if we have learned a little bit. Paul also says the one who does not eat, let him not judge the one who eats.

People can misunderstand our freedom. People can misunderstand the guy who knows that he can eat meat offered to idols. And he does so.

He can be judged by the ones who say, look, he's participating in idolatry there. He's eating that meat offered to idols or whatever it might be. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls, Paul says in verse 4. Indeed, he will be made to stand for God is able to make him stand.

One person esteems one day above another. Another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

And that's the key. This is the principle. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind.

Within the bounds of what the Word of God tells us is sinful. Those are the hard and fast pillars. Certain things are always wrong.

You can never find a good time to commit adultery. You can never find an occasion to commit murder. You can never find an occasion when some of these things are good.

They're always bad. But many things, perhaps most things in life, fall into this area where we need to use discretion and we need to decide, well, how should I organize my day? How much time should I spend in this activity or that activity? We need to be convinced in our mind that what we're doing is pleasing to the Lord and that what we are doing, we are doing heartily as unto the Lord and not to please ourselves and not to please people. That's the guiding principle.

He who observes a day observes it to the Lord. He who does not observe the day to the Lord, he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord and gives God thanks.

He who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat and gives God thanks. We're talking about people who have made choices, personal lifestyle choices, and they've made that choice because in their mind they believe that this is what best pleases the Lord. And this should give us pause for thought because we know there are people who are believers and are doing things that we disagree with, that we know better.

People who are going out all elbows and knees, knocking on doors, trying to evangelize. And we say, oh, that's an invasion of privacy. They ought to know better.

The people standing down at the airport handing out tracts. And we say, you know, that person ought to know better. Evangelism is the work of the Holy Spirit.

It's not a work of man. And we don't go out there and intrude into people who don't have an interest and so forth. But we have to caution ourselves and keep in mind that it isn't the fact that someone is knocking on a door or the fact that someone is handing out a tract that is inherently right or inherently wrong.

And isn't it interesting that many of these ministries that we look down our nose at and we say, oh, that's parachurch. They're not operating under the umbrella of authority of a pastor. Many of the things that we understand from the Word of God, step back and look.

There are people being saved in those situations. There are people growing in the Lord in some of these parachurch organizations. There are people in the Navigators and people in Campus Crusade and Youth for Christ and Young Life and some of these others.

But if you look at them from the standpoint of the Word of God, that's not God's optimum plan. That's not what God designed in terms of function for believers and function for the church. And the thinking of a lot of these things, I look at some things like to name two.

I don't necessarily like to throw rocks and name names, but you can look at promise keepers and find a lot of fault from the Word of God with the thinking behind that organization and the way that they do things is not scriptural. You can look at the Experiencing God program and find a lot of fault with it from the Word of God. However, and this is a big however, it isn't the program itself, it isn't the organization itself that counts.

It is the heart and soul of the believers engaged in those things that counts. Why are they doing what they are doing? All of us, at some point, have been involved in things that in retrospect we realize weren't in the best line with the Word of God. They weren't central.

They weren't right there on the mark. They were off to the left or off to the right. But we were a

young immature believer at that point and we did learn and we did grow and we did make progress even though we weren't right smack in the center of the best and highest and most accurate.

But God used that and we've grown out of that and we look back on it and we can see the problems with it that we didn't see at the time. Well, we need to give that same latitude to our fellow believers. There are other believers right now who are engaged in their early phases of growth.

And if they are growing, if they are positive, they're going to sooner or later see some of these things. And it's not our place to go running down there and say, you're wrong. Don't you see the flaws in this? Don't you see the trouble? We are to accept them.

We are to tolerate them. We are to be elder brothers and elder sisters and encourage them. Encourage the good things.

In any Christian organization, there are some good things. Every Christian organization acknowledges Christ. That's a good thing.

Most Christian organizations do some service to the Word of God, incorporate it in some way, shape, or form. Well, let's encourage that. Let's applaud that.

Let's build that part up and minimize our criticism and our frowns at the things that we see that are wrong. Let's encourage the good things and encourage one another and build one another up. That's what Paul is saying here.

Because it isn't the organization. It isn't the activity. It isn't the ministry that counts.

It's the heart and soul of believers that are involved. And God approves and God is pleased when people participate in these organizations and when they engage in these ministries and when they make these mistakes if they are doing it out of a desire to please God. It's misguided.

It's ignorant. But their heart is in the right place. Their motivation is sound.

All of us who have been parents, we see our children wanting to help and wanting to please their parents. And many times they may do the wrong thing. They may be wanting to come in and help and spill something.

They may come in and do something that's destructive or that's wrong. But they weren't trying to do something wrong or destructive. They were trying to do something helpful and something that expressed their love for their parents and their desire to be pleasing.

Well, how do we view that? We look at the thinking behind it and we don't spank them and criticize them and harp on them for doing the wrong thing. We encourage them because we know

their heart is in the right place. Well, that's the principle that Paul is expressing here.

It doesn't matter if somebody thinks you've got to go to a church with a steeple. And others of us understand that it isn't the building that constitutes the church. It's the attitude of those who come to worship and to fellowship in God's Word.

Some people think that you need to be baptized with water. Well, that's fine. Water baptism doesn't hurt anything.

There are others of us who realize that that's a teaching tool and it's not an ordinance and it's not a hard and fast. It's not a given that has to be done or you're somehow lacking as a believer. But it's not our place to go and throw stones and crack the glass of the baptistry and say you're wrong.

If people want to do that, if they're doing that because they believe that pleases the Lord, God is pleased. If somebody came to me and said they wanted to be baptized with water and after talking with them it was clear to me that that was an expression in their minds of their understanding of pleasing God and having a witness and a testimony to their gratitude to God for what God has done at the point of regeneration, I'd take them out to the nearest body of water and baptize them. It isn't the act that makes a difference.

It's the thinking behind it that counts. And we have wide latitude in this age and in the church, in the body of Christ, in the things that we do. We can organize a church.

We can have two or three pastors. We can have this many elders or that many deacons. We can have this kind of a building or that.

We can meet in this place or that. We can meet on this night or that. We can have this form of worship or that order of service or whatever it might be.

There are no rules that govern those things. There are principles. There's a principle of authority in the church.

There's a principle that there should be a final and highest authority in the church, the senior pastor, if you will. There is a principle that teaching take place, that things be done decently and in good order, that there be discipline, that there be the expulsion of those who are counterproductive and destructive and who are divisive, that there be separation for them and prayer for them and so forth. There are many principles that guide it, but there are no rules.

And so people who argue and fight over, well, is it elder rule or is it pastor rule and should it be elders or should it be deacons and so forth, completely miss this point. What we look at is the principle. Are we living to please the Lord? Are we living to please ourselves? Is what we do building up to ourselves and building up to others or is it tearing down? Is it divisive? We can do a good thing and if it divides the body, it's wrong.

We can engage in a good... This is one of the most common misunderstandings for seminary students and for pastors and people who are in vocational Christian ministry. You can do a good thing and it can be completely wrong. An evangelist can be completely wrong if he goes out and evangelizes and his family falls apart or his marriage falls apart.

You can be going out and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and doing harm to people if you do it in a wrong way, if you do it in a way that reflects discredit on the name of Jesus Christ, if you do it in a way that distracts people and divides people and causes conflict instead of building them up. This is a very important principle and it's one that Paul spends this entire chapter talking about. We're going to pause here and take our break and when we come back we're going to finish chapter 14 and prepare ourselves for chapter 15 in Romans next time.

Let's pause here and take a break.